

PRO Wrestling STRATED

**I'M PROUD
TO BE
DIFFERENT**

AN EXPLOSIVE INTERVIEW WITH WWE'S NEWEST
MEGASTAR... **KEVIN OWENS** +

ROH VS. NEW JAPAN
DOLPH ZIGGLER
DREW GALLOWAY
U.S. & I-C TITLES

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FROM the DESK OF...

THERE IS NOT much that can be said about Dusty Rhodes that wasn't tweeted by those who knew him best on the day when he shockingly left us on June 11 at age 69. Everybody, from Vince McMahon and Dixie Carter (whom he worked for) to Matt Bloom and Adam Pearce (whom he worked with) to Enzo Amore and Becky Lynch (whom he worked hard) expressed their love in one way or another for a teacher, a sounding board, a problem-solver, an encourager, a friend.

Dusty Rhodes was the grandfather many twentysomethings at the WWE Performance Center no longer had in their lives. He held his pupils to a standard he had years ago established, his specialty being public speaking. He worked them hard, to the point where some might have been frustrated because no youngster, or oldster for that matter, could be what Dusty was. But the man never walked away from someone who was willing to put forth the effort. Everyone in WWE developmental comes into the program with a measure of physical acumen. Few have the communications skills that will get them out of developmental and into a position to make a substantial living in this business. Dusty Rhodes was not only among the very best talkers; he was also highly skilled at teaching the art form.

I'm sure most of his students study videos of Dusty Rhodes masterfully using his verbal skills to connect with the public. But I wonder how many of them delve into the WWE Network archives to see his matches. The thing about Dusty Rhodes is that he had an innate ability to reach the fans on different levels. His told his story not only with his words, but with his actions and expressions. He was the underdog son of a plumber, a man who proudly wore the same blue collar the fans in the cheap seats wore. But as far away as those fans may have been, they could feel his heart beating because every man, woman, and child in those seats believed that it was beating for them.

Was he a great wrestler? Not in the way Lou Thesz or Jack Brisco was. Was he an all-time great? Well, his Wikipedia resume would not fit on this page, but suffice it to say he won three NWA World titles, he's in the *Wrestling Observer* and WWE Halls of Fame, and he was voted eight *PWI* Achievement Awards, plus the Stanley Weston Award. He was a successful (if controversial) booker, he was the proud papa of four, including Dustin "Goldust" Rhodes and Cody "Stardust" Rhodes. He was kind and decent to the media, and he was the idol of millions of fans worldwide.

This column space was originally intended for some words on this issue's cover boy Kevin Owens, a man who, incidentally, reminds me of Rhodes for a variety of reasons. When Owens was signed by WWE and assigned to work at the Performance Center, many of us who had seen him perform for the past dozen years or so scoffed. But, according to Owens in this issue's "Press Conference" (page 20), he was not the least bit offended by the notion of taking a step back to take many steps forward. He relished the idea of gleaning knowledge from the assembled experts in Orlando, and he mentioned Dusty Rhodes in particular. It didn't matter that Owens was already considered one of the best talkers in the business. How many of us get an opportunity to learn from the best?

Owens and his Performance Center classmates will sorely miss Dusty Rhodes. We all will.

Stu Saks
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A full-page photograph of Sasha Banks, the NXT Women's Champion. She is standing in a confident pose, wearing her signature red hair and red sunglasses perched on her head. She is dressed in a red sequined blazer over a matching crop top and shorts, accessorized with a gold chain necklace featuring a large dollar sign pendant. She holds the NXT Women's Championship belt in her right hand. The background is a dark blue wall with large, stylized yellow and orange geometric shapes. The text 'Sasha Banks' is written in a white cursive font in the top right corner, with 'NXT WOMEN'S CHAMPION' in a bold, white sans-serif font below it. A small credit 'PHOTO BY STU SAKS' is also present.

*Sasha
Banks*

**NXT WOMEN'S
CHAMPION**

PHOTO BY STU SAKS

OCTOBER 2015

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The fact that Kevin Owens has achieved as much as he has in WWE is not all that surprising. Once he got his foot in the door, many assumed his vast talents would lead him to the top. The bigger problem was getting an opportunity from a company that likes a body type that doesn't come close to describing this Canadian. Owens always has a lot to say, and Senior Writer Al Castle was on the receiving end
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Ring of Honor and New Japan have staged several co-promotions over the past couple of years, but they have only teased a matchup of their reigning heavy-weight champs. We want not only 1 vs. 1, but 2 vs. 2, 3 vs. 3, 4 vs. 4, and so on. What a card that would be!
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The crowning of John Cena as U.S. champion and Daniel Bryan as Intercontinental champion at WrestleMania 31 may have ushered in a new era for WWE's so-called secondary titles. Hall of Fame announcer Jim Ross offers his unique perspective on how WWE can educate the fans as to the historical significance of those formerly celebrated championships
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After being declared the future of WWE by none other than Vince McMahon, Drew McIntyre couldn't have slid farther from the top of the company. He's once again part of a three-man group, but in TNA he means serious business!

44 TOMORROW'S COVERS TODAY: PWI EXAMINES THE NEXT WAVE OF WRESTLING SUPERSTARS

Are you ready to see Sasha Banks and Adam Cole on the cover of PWI? That day may be coming soon for several budding stars under the age of 30. We examine 15 of them (and put them on "covers" of their own) in this special section



COVER PHOTO:
Stu Saks

COVER DESIGN:
Edd Wright

BEFORE the BELL

COMPILED BY MIKE BESSLER

IT'S GOOD TO BE THE KING: THE JERRY LAWLER STORY

FOR WRESTLING FANS who aren't yet old enough to cast a vote for public office or legally procure an alcoholic beverage, it's likely that Jerry "The King" Lawler is something of a head-scratcher. After all, how does a guy who wears gold painted T-shirts and a cheesy plastic crown land such a plum of a gig week in and week out?

A fleeting glance at the back of Lawler's WWE trading card might be the first clue that there's more to the guy than an occasional one-liner or off-color joke. Indeed, there's a lot more to the story. And WWE's DVD set *It's Good To Be The King: The Jerry Lawler Story* tells the tale with the pomp and circumstance fit for a monarch of the squared circle.

The documentary portion of this three-disc offering tackles the ambitious objective of boiling over 45 years of Lawler's illustrious career to a running time of less than two hours. WWE goes back to Lawler's humble

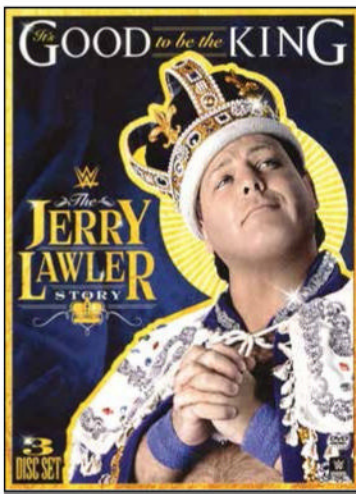
beginnings as an artist and radio personality in Memphis, Tennessee, sharing perspectives from some of the most important people in Jerry's formative years, including Jimmy Hart and the voice of Memphis Wrestling, Lance Russell. Lawler's celebrated feud with Andy Kaufman garners a healthy amount of attention—as well it should, seeing as how that famous angle brought the King copious quantities of international notoriety and ultimately greased the skids for his career in WWE.

From Lawler's first appearance in WWE as a wrestler to his transition to the announce team, the documentary provides perspective on most aspects of his work with the company, including his raucous shenanigans during the Attitude Era and his first and only shot at the WWE title. It's not all wine and roses, either. Lawler's abrupt departure from WWE in 2001, prompted by the company's unceremonious release

of his then-wife Stacy "The Kat" Carter, is discussed in some detail not just by Lawler, but also through the recollections of Jim Ross, Vince McMahon, and even Carter herself. Jerry's on-air heart attack in 2012 gets some coverage as well, including some hard-to-watch backstage footage of Lawler receiving aid from paramedics.

The remaining two discs of this set are a cornucopia of old-school grappling. The match selection is surprisingly light on Lawler's Memphis-era fare, relying heavily on material from WWE's archives, including AWA and WCCW material. But a few gems from Jerry's days at the Mid-South Coliseum make the cut, including his "empty arena" brawl with Terry Funk and a classic bout with "Superstar" Bill Dundee. Curiously, Lawler's epic inter-promotional rivalry with ECW doesn't figure as prominently in this set as one might expect, although the denouement of that angle, a showdown with Tommy Dreamer at the 1997 Hardcore Heaven show, does appear.

When regarded as the sum of its parts, the DVD production is more than just a simple retrospective and collection of great matches. It's tribute to one of professional wrestling's most prolific and influential performers assembled with all the care and accolades that Lawler's storied career deserves. An exceptional chronicle of the life and times one of wrestling's all time greats, we give *It's Good To Be The King: The Jerry Lawler Story* four out of five suplexes.



TALKIN' TRASH

10. Destination America adds Ring of Honor to its prime time television lineup.

An incurable optimist, Dixie Carter responded (not really) to the development with enthusiasm, stating, "Finally, wrestling fans will appreciate TNA even more once it is offered in conjunction with a superb product."

9. Dean Ambrose steals the WWE title belt from Seth Rollins after winning by DQ at Elimination Chamber.

The following day, Ambrose was seen on an episode of *Pawn Stars* trying to talk Chumlee into giving him a six-pack and 50 bucks for the title strap.

8. Hideo Itami is sidelined with a shoulder injury.

Although there's no such thing as good timing when it comes to injuries, it's particularly unfortunate for the international superstar, who was blazing hot.

7. TNA threatens to sue various online news outlets over reports that Impact Wrestling has been canceled by Destination America.

In further efforts to quell a rising tide of rumors regarding the company's woes, cease-and-desist letters were also sent to three HAM radio operators, a couple of kids using soup cans and string as a phone, and a flock of carrier pigeons.

6. Stone Cold Steve Austin's acclaimed podcast returns to WWE Network.

It's a big win for budget-conscious WWE, as the company will no longer have to cover Y2J's hair-gel expenses for televised episodes of *Talk Is Jericho*.

5. Samoa Joe joins the NXT roster.

Eager to escape the gimmick-laden TNA locker room, Joe is looking forward to getting back to straight-up grappling by squaring off against a couple of Jersey Shore stereotypes, a flamboyant male model, and a shadowy computer hacker.

4. Eric Bischoff files suit against TNA alleging that he was not paid in full for his time with the company.

Here's a list of the top 10 wrestling-related items you've been talking about lately and our gut reaction to each:

Disgruntled fans are considering a countersuit against Bischoff, alleging that he did not entertain them in full during his run with TNA.

3. Daniel Bryan relinquishes the Intercontinental championship after suffering a career-threatening injury.

Very unfortunate, but Bryan's rugged appearance and scraggly beard offer him a promising post-wrestling slot in the supporting cast of *Duck Dynasty*.

2. Billy Corgan joins TNA as senior producer.

Corgan explained that the career move has been a mainstay on his "bucket list" for many years, ranking prominently with other noteworthy goals like piloting the *Hindenburg* and finding a word that rhymes with orange.

1. Kevin Owens defeats John Cena at Elimination Chamber.

Before the match, Owens dedicated his performance to his family via Twitter. The touching tweet inspired the good people at Hallmark to create a new holiday entitled, "Beat Up A Grown Man For Your Kids' Enjoyment" Day.



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WE HEARD THAT!

"Dixie Carter gave me exactly what I wanted and it wasn't a hard decision. I wasn't upset. I was excited about signing another year with TNA. I think they did an incredible job this year. They had to refocus, they had to regroup, they had some issues in the past, and I think they've done an incredible job of making their way back. Are they back to what they were? No. But they're on their way and they're doing so many good things right now that it makes me excited about being part of the company."

— Kurt Angle, discussing his decision to re-sign with TNA, from an interview with *The Mirror*

"I hope that the promotion is keeping their talents and the talents' families informed as to what is going on regarding this unfortunate matter."

— Jim Ross, on early reports that Destination America has canceled *Impact Wrestling*

"If you see an episode and I'm on it, I'm usually getting in some kind of trouble."

— Tyson Kidd, discussing his role on *Total Divas* with atlanticcity.com

"You never really retire from wrestling; you can't. You just step away for a while."

— The Rock, to Ronda Rousey, as recalled by Rousey in an interview with wwe.com

ONE TO WATCH: *LA ROSA NEGRA*

Pay no mind to Shakespeare's musings regarding the sweetness of a rose. Had the bard ever encountered La Rosa Negra—known to some fans as Black Rose—he'd have been hard-pressed to pen a gentle sonnet about the tough-as-nails lady grappler. Hailing from Dorado, Puerto Rico, the feisty female is dedicating her very existence to one simple mission: in-ring dominance.

Now 33 years old, the diminutive spittfire found inspiration in the exploits of American wrestlers such as Kurt Angle and Shawn Michaels, as well as Puerto Rican grappler El Bronco #1. She started wrestling in 2002, working as a manager in Carlos Colon's World Wrestling Council. In 2004, La Rosa began competing in matches, earning her stripes under the tutelage of El Bronco #1 and Ricky Santana.

La Rosa Negra won WWC gold for the first time in 2006 and grabbed the title twice more, once that same year and again in 2010. She ventured to the United States four years ago, competing in promotions like SHINE Wrestling and Philadelphia's Pro Wrestling Syndicate. La Rosa held Florida-based Ring Warriors Battling Bombshells championship for almost three years, from 2012 until she dropped the strap to Santana Garrett earlier this year.

A well-rounded athlete and performer, La Rosa Negra integrates the brash and gritty style of Puerto Rican wrestling with kickboxing and pure athleticism. "I do everything," La Rosa said. "I fly high, I work old school and new style."

Despite her tenacious approach to competitors, La Rosa Negra is quick to express accolades for her hard-working opponents. She cites her bouts with Amazonas in Puerto Rico's IWA as well as a three-match series against Angelina Love in Pro Wrestling Syndicate as some of her greatest learning experiences. She also credits Madison Eagles and Cheerleader Melissa as some of her toughest opponents. La Rosa recently capped a nasty feud with Taylor Made in SHINE, besting her rival in a Brass Knuckles on a Pole match.

With bold aspirations for the future, La Rosa Negra is keeping the door open to any and all possibilities. She has expressed an interest in honing her craft through work in Japan, but she's also looking for a shot in SHIMMER, Ring of Honor, or TNA. La Rosa even cut an audition tape for WWE's *Tough Enough*, filming the video while riding her bike around town.

"This is my life," La Rosa Negra proclaims. "This is my job. It's not a part-time thing for me; this is serious."



PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: *ADAM PEARCE*

For Adam Pearce, gratitude isn't a fleeting emotion reserved for special occasions and holidays; it's an omnipresent state of being. After nearly two decades as an indy stalwart, Pearce recently landed a dream gig with the biggest of the industry's big leagues. Now employed as a coach and producer for WWE, Pearce's journey to professional wrestling Nirvana was an uncanny path of twists and turns. Much to his credit, Pearce doesn't regret a single step along the way.

From an early age, Pearce had athletic aspirations. He played football in high school, but his time on the gridiron was cut short by a debilitating medical condition known as Acute Muscular Compartment Syndrome. During his convalescence from surgery, pro wrestling gave him a new lease on life.

"I never intended to get into wrestling," Pearce recalls. "I was a fan, but I wasn't obsessed with it. After my surgery, I got really depressed. Wrestling kind of came along while I was at a crossroads."

Pearce moved quickly to gain a foothold on a career between the ropes, wrestling his first match at the age of 17. Just a year later, Pearce was offered a contract by WCW but declined the opportunity after carefully weighing his options.

"I didn't want to live life out of a suitcase," the 37-year-old recalls. "I got married and started a family just a few years later. There are different paths, and if I had taken the chance to go to WCW back then, I wouldn't have the life I have today."

Pearce counts all of his experiences—including a lengthy stint as the director of wrestling operations for Ring of Honor, his five runs as NWA champion, and a brief but memorable spot as a TNA Gut Check contender—as valuable opportunities for learning and development. His watershed moment came in 2012 when he received a surprise invitation to a WWE Talent Tryout Camp. But rather than secure his talents as a tights-and-boots competitor, WWE instead looked to draw upon Pearce's insights and experiences by utilizing him as a coach and trainer.

Pearce worked with WWE's NXT roster periodically in 2013 and 2014, broadening his backstage role by working as a producer for the critically acclaimed NXT TakeOver: R Evolution event.

WWE recognized Pearce's value to the NXT team earlier this year by offering him a contract. A 15-year resident of San Diego, California, Pearce recently

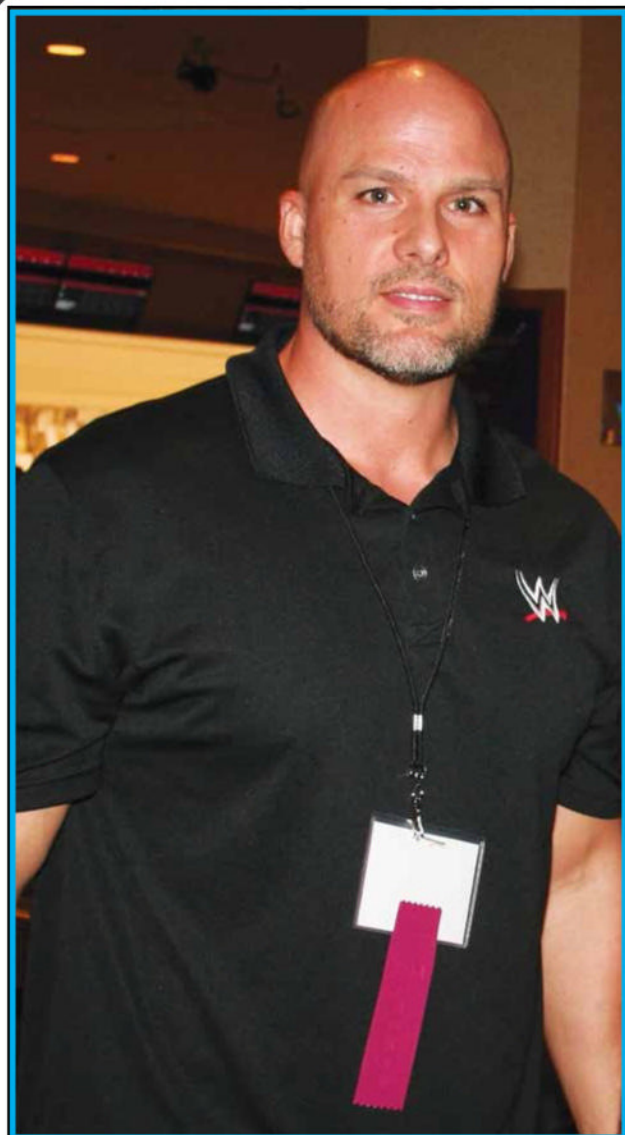


PHOTO BY MIKE LANO

made the decision to relocate to Florida so that he could be in close proximity to WWE's Performance Center. It was a tough call for Pearce to uproot his wife and kids from their longtime home, but he made certain that the move was in the best interests of his family. A devoted husband and father, Pearce credits his family, along with the contributions of a handful of mentors like WWE Hall of Famers Gerald Brisco and Nick Bockwinkel, as the most important influences on his exceptional career.

"Work hard, treat people fairly, and earn respect. I try not to be cliché, but that has always been an important mantra for me," Pearce said. "When you do those things, doors open for you. That's how I've lived my life in the business."

RINGSIDE

WITH HARRY BURKETT

TNA PRESIDENT **Dixie Carter** went into damage-control mode after Ring of Honor suddenly premiered as part of Destination America's Wednesday night lineup, with its one-hour *Ring Of Honor Wrestling* program serving as the 8 p.m. Eastern lead-in for that night's two-hour *Impact Wrestling* broadcast. Ring of Honor's move blindsided the entire industry, particularly the TNA locker room, which was already reeling from rumors that Destination America planned to cancel *Impact Wrestling* in the fall—only six months after joining the network.

Questions ensued: Why did Ring of Honor catch Destination America's attention when TNA was already on the schedule? Did Carter know about the ROH deal and keep it a secret from

her roster? Did TNA really have a fighting chance of remaining on Destination America?

TNA wrestlers wanted some answers.

Carter held a conference call with talent and other employees shortly after Ring of Honor announced it was joining Destination America. According to *Pro Wrestling Torch*, the company prez insisted she was still planning for *Impact Wrestling* to remain on the network through 2016. But when pressed about the show's rumored cancellation, Carter stated that confidentiality clauses and legal advice prevented her from discussing the situation. The call failed to reassure anyone.

Many TNA wrestlers are actively seeking more independent dates and exploring their options. TNA

grants permission to its talent to appear for other promotions, as long as they don't appear on national television. **Tyrus** (formerly known as **Brodus Clay** in WWE), however, was denied permission to compete in **Jeff Jarrett's** new Global Force Wrestling promotion. **Karen Jarrett**, Jeff's wife, took a swipe at Dixie by tweeting, "Sounds like someone is throwing a temper tantrum in Nashville. Oh, you can't control the world, darlin'."

Carter was still making moves to better the product before news of the ROH-Destination America deal, asking Smashing Pumpkins lead singer **Billy Corgan** to join TNA as senior producer of creative and talent development. Corgan is a lifelong wrestling fan, getting involved with ECW and AAA over the years, and launching Chicago-based Resistance Pro Wrestling in 2011. Considering Corgan is one of the most innovative performers in the music industry, it's no surprise that he would be interested in the creative aspects of the business, but it is a surprise that he would want to be involved in talent development.

"If I could run anything, I'd love to run developmental," Corgan said in a conference call with *PWI* and other media outlets. "I would love to put people in place and have the resources in place to create a TNA developmental system to create stars that are wholly identified with TNA."

As far as the promotion of the TNA product, Corgan views social media as an untapped opportunity. "I think there's still a great struggle in the wrestling business how to use [social media]," he said. "I'll give you a great example. If you go to most wrestlers' Twitter—it doesn't matter what company they work for—they might be tweeting a picture of their cats, but they're supposed to be a heel. That does cause a level of confusion in the marketplace."

Corgan knew he'd be part of a rebuilding effort when he signed

Dixie Carter tried to smooth things over with TNA talent during a conference call shortly after rumors spread of Destination America's decision to cancel *Impact* and the network's agreement with Ring of Honor. She wasn't entirely successful.

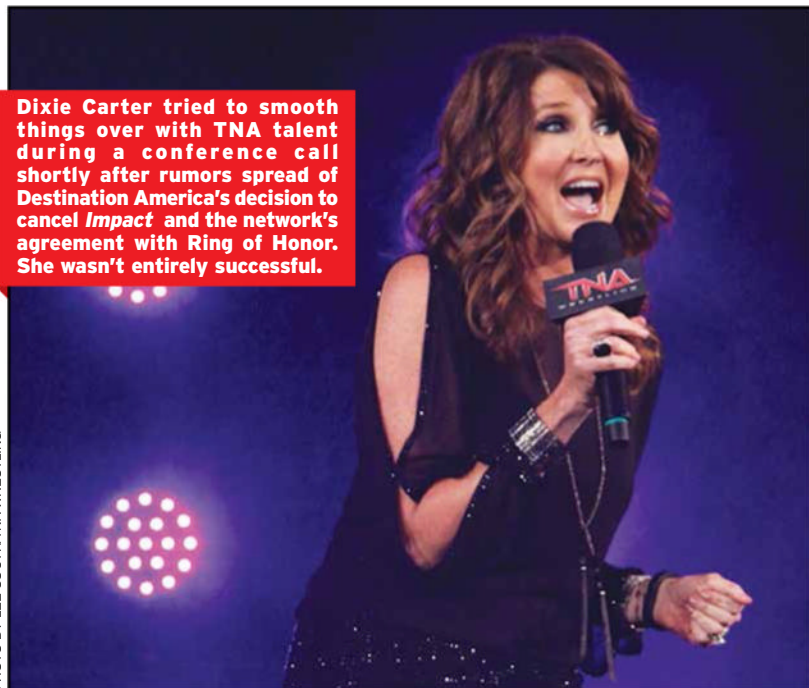


PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING

up for the job. Now his task seems more daunting than ever.

Former TNA and ROH champion **Samoa Joe** made his WWE debut in dramatic fashion, confronting **Kevin Owens** to stop his assault on **Sami Zayn** at the conclusion of the WWE Network's NXT Takeover: Unstoppable event. He also participated in the next round of NXT tapings at Full Sail University in Winter Park, Florida. Initially at least, Joe and agent **Bill Behrens** had negotiated a groundbreaking deal in which Joe could continue to wrestle for Ring of Honor and independent promotions in addition to NXT.

That quickly changed due to two factors: ROH's increased prominence due to its Destination America deal and Joe's very impressive merchandising figures. According to sources, **Vince McMahon** and **Triple-H** agreed they wanted Joe to become a full-time performer, getting the callup to the main roster sooner rather than later. He has already competed in dark matches prior to *Raw*.

It will be interesting to see whether the Joe-Owens NXT feud continues in WWE. Owens, of course, pulled off the most stunning upset since **Brock Lesnar** ended **The Undertaker's** un-

Smashing Pumpkins' star **Billy Corgan** (photographed at *WrestleMania 26* in 2010) is starting at TNA at a time when morale cannot be at its peak. Full of ideas and energy, Corgan is determined to make his presence felt.



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

defeated *WrestleMania* streak, pinning U.S. champion **John Cena** cleanly in a non-title match at WWE's Elimination Chamber event. Now that Cena has fallen prey to Owens' pop-up power bomb on two occasions, look for the 15-time world champ to devise a strategy to counter the NXT champ's most devastating maneuver.

Another stunning upset was **Joey Mercury's** pinfall of WWE World champion **Seth Rollins** on the June 8 edition of *Raw*. Rollins, flinching over criticism that **J&J Security** was responsible for him keeping the World title, named Mercury and **Jamie Noble** as his opponents in a handicap match that night. **Dean Ambrose**, who

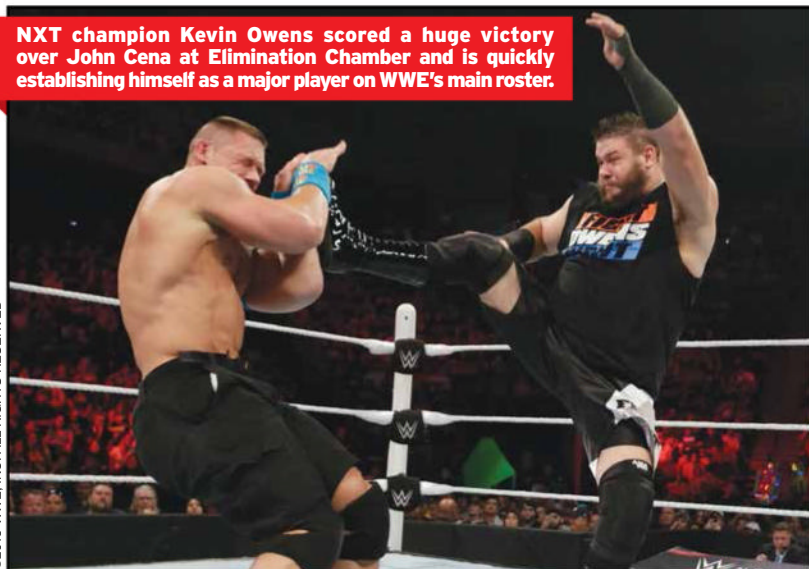
stole the World title belt at Elimination Chamber, slid the hardware into the ring, prompting Rollins to pick it up, and giving Mercury the quick opportunity to roll up his boss for the win.

Mercury and Noble, two relatively youthful veterans, both feel they never got a chance to reach their true potential in the business. Despite their behind-the-scenes roles, could we see Mercury, a former WWE tag team champ, and Noble, a former cruiserweight champ, make a run for **New Day's** World tag team belts? It could happen.

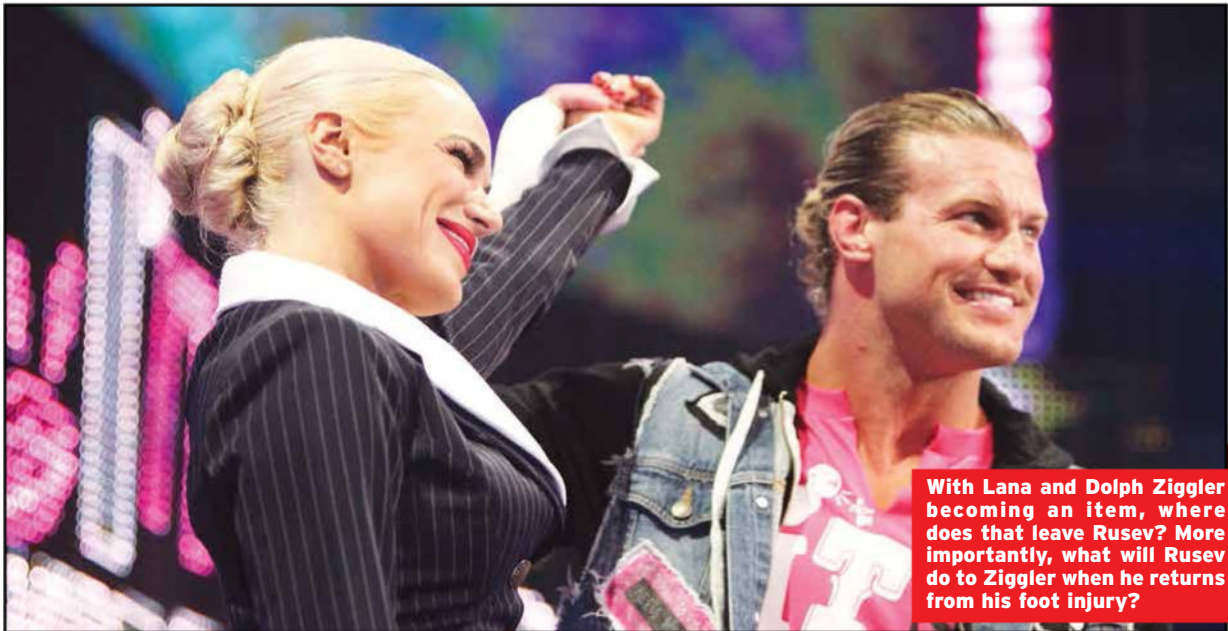
Rusev's career, on the other hand, has derailed since the 305-pounder tapped out and lost his U.S. title to Cena at *WrestleMania 31*. The loss affected Rusev's psyche and he began blaming manager **Lana** for being too much of a ringside distraction and publicly castigated her for playing to the crowd. In late-May, Rusev renounced his sympathies with Lana's native Russia and began carrying the Bulgarian flag to the ring.

Even worse, he suffered a fractured foot during a match against **Ryback** on *Smackdown*, missing an opportunity to compete for the vacant Intercontinental championship inside the Elimination Chamber. And during Rusev's convalescence, Lana has been

NXT champion Kevin Owens scored a huge victory over John Cena at Elimination Chamber and is quickly establishing himself as a major player on WWE's main roster.



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With Lana and Dolph Ziggler becoming an item, where does that leave Rusev? More importantly, what will Rusev do to Ziggler when he returns from his foot injury?

smooching with **Dolph Ziggler** and escorting him to ringside.

Rusev's injury aside, it seems we've witnessed the end of one of the hottest acts in the business. If **Zeb Colter** asks him to become a "Real American," he's finished.

Hideo Itami, better known in his native Japan as **KENTA**, began training at the WWE Performance Center and competing in NXT about a year ago—and now a shoulder injury has put him on the disabled list for perhaps the rest of 2015. This is quite a setback for the protege of **Kenta Kobashi** and former GHC champion. WWE fans caught a glimpse of Itami during the Andre the Giant Memorial Battle Royal at WrestleMania 31, where he was eliminated by eventual winner **The Big Show**.

UFC women's champion **Ronda Rousey** remains coy about her future involvement with WWE, although the latest word is that UFC President **Dana White** will not allow her to appear in WWE. Rousey made headlines at WrestleMania 31 when she joined **The Rock** in a physical confrontation with WWE's power couple, Triple-H and **Stephanie McMahon**.

"The nature of the WWE is to be cool," Rousey told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. "To be in it is to be

extra cool." Sources close to Rousey suggest the fighter would want to keep any future involvement a complete surprise. She is a lifelong wrestling fan and counts **Roddy Piper** and **The Four Horsemen** as among her favorites.

Speaking of athletic greats, the wrestling world lost one of its all-time best back on April 27. **Verne Gagne**—the 30-year owner and driving force behind the American Wrestling Association and 10-time former AWA World heavyweight champion—passed away at his daughter's home in Bloomington, Minnesota. He was 89 years old.

Gagne was perhaps the greatest all-around athlete to come out of Minnesota, excelling in football, baseball, and wrestling at Robbinsdale High School and playing football at the University of Minnesota, where he was named to the All-Big Ten Team. He embraced wrestling, too, winning the first of four Big Ten wrestling championships in 1944 and two NCAA wrestling championships. He went on to teach hand-to-hand combat in the U.S. Marine Corps and even qualified for the Greco-Roman wrestling team at the 1948 Olympics, but did not compete.

Gagne rose to prominence as the NWA U.S. champion based in

Chicago and became a national star via the Dumont Network in the early days of television. He parlayed that success into becoming a promoter, joining **Wally Karbo** in taking over the Minnesota territory and expanding their newfound AWA to major cities, including Chicago, Omaha, Denver, Winnipeg, Las Vegas, and San Francisco, over a wide geographic area. At his world-renowned training school at his farm in frigid Minnesota, he trained a who's who of pro wrestlers, including **Ric Flair**, **Bob Backlund**, **Rick Steamboat**, **Ken Patera**, **The Iron Sheik**, **Jim Brunzell**, and **Buddy Rose**. He was also the first to promote **Hulk Hogan** as a national wrestling star in the early-1980s.

Gagne's twilight years were bittersweet, with the AWA going into a long decline until it went out of business. He lost much of his fortune, and was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. He took residence at a Bloomington assisted-living facility for a period, where he shoved another resident, who died from his injuries. The Hennepin County Prosecutor's Office did not file charges due to Gagne's dementia.

From all reports, Gagne's funeral was a classy affair, with many AWA stalwarts in attendance, and

couples such as Triple-H and Stephanie McMahon, and **Jesse** and **Terry Ventura**, sending flowers.

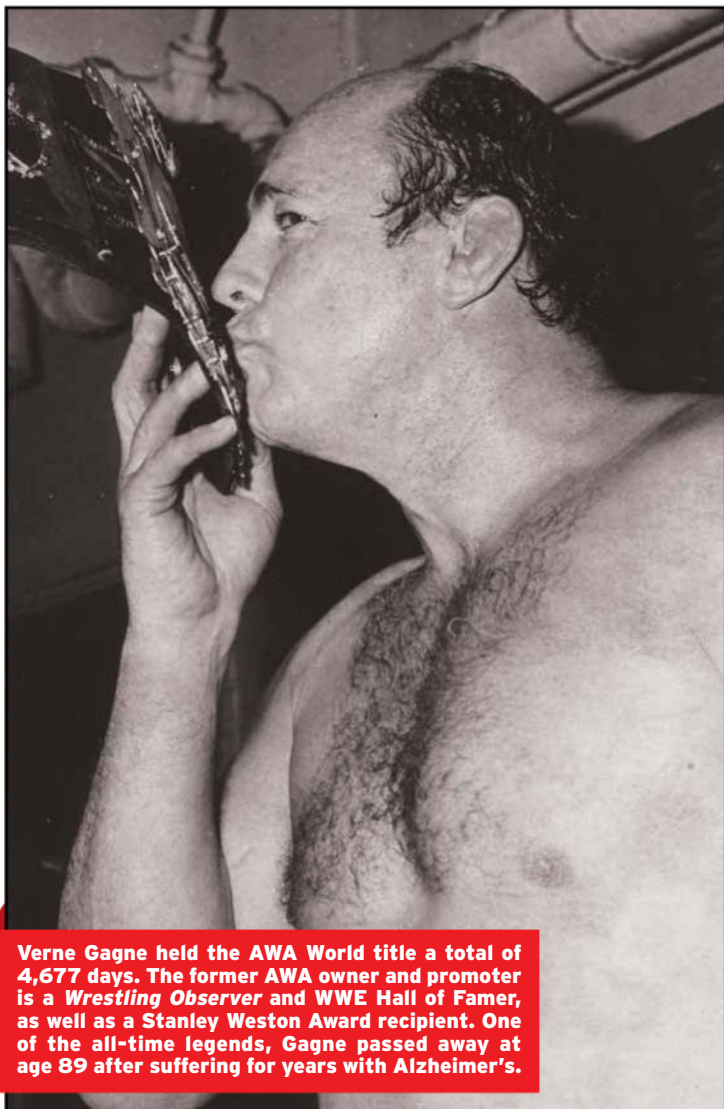
Gagne's death signals the end of an era. Not only did he make the AWA a part of the Big Three, which included the NWA and the WWF, but he—along with **Lou Thesz** and **Bruno Sammartino**—were considered the titans of the sport for a generation.

In shocking news, 1980s tag team great **Tommy Rogers** was found dead in his Honolulu home on June 1. He was 54 years old. The handsome star debuted in 1980, first becoming noticed as a rising singles talent on WTBS' *World Championship*

Wrestling, and then achieving fame as a member of **The Fantastics** with **Bobby Fulton**. Rogers continued to wrestle on the independent circuit until he underwent a hip replacement in 2007.

Before we part, I'd also like to acknowledge the passings of former Tennessee wrestler and manager **Ron Wright** at age 77, influential New Zealand wrestler and promoter **Steve Rickard** at age 85, former rugby star and All-Japan wrestler **Ashura Hara** at age 68, and female wrestler **Emily Arthur**, most famous for her Memphis feud with **Downtown Bruno**, at age 49.

That's all for now. Save a ringside seat for me.



Verne Gagne held the AWA World title a total of 4,677 days. The former AWA owner and promoter is a *Wrestling Observer* and WWE Hall of Famer, as well as a Stanley Weston Award recipient. One of the all-time legends, Gagne passed away at age 89 after suffering for years with Alzheimer's.

NEWS ANALYSIS

ROH'S COUP

Diehard fans have always enthusiastically supported Ring of Honor, a strength of support that just hasn't been there for TNA. Maybe it's because ROH adhered to the original vision it espoused in 2002, to be a wrestling-first, grassroots, traditional promotion. TNA has always been more interested in having a successful TV show. Fans have been part of the movement in ROH, and that hasn't always been the case in TNA.

MERCURY RISING

I first saw Joey Mercury (Joey Matthews) at an IPWA show in Chincoteague, Virginia, and, based on his interactions with the few hundred fans in attendance, I knew he could be a major star. And anyone who witnessed the grisly facial injuries he suffered at a WWE pay-per-view in 2006 would agree he deserves all the success that's coming to him.

RUSEV'S FATE

Is Lana destined to outshine her former charge and become a huge personality while Rusev becomes an afterthought? Is Lana the Tammy Sytch to Rusev's Chris Candido? Is she the Trish Stratus to his Test and Albert? It's hard to see how Rusev's career maintains momentum from here. Trickier yet, Rusev and Lana are a real-life couple sharing a home. Let's hope Lana's skyrocketing popularity causes no discord.

TELL ME A GOOD VERNE STORY

Anytime I have interviewed an AWA legend, I have always asked for a "Verne story." Whether it's been Bobby Heenan, Rick Martel, or Stan Hansen, they have always provided me with a colorful anecdote depicting Verne as stubborn, absurdly competitive, or even a bit paranoid. But even those wrestlers who had a beef with Verne still regarded him with affection and respect. The sport will miss him.

PHOTO BY BOB SABRE

QUICK COUNT

BY AL CASTLE

VIDEO GAMES SURE have come a long way since the days of Randy Savage “powering up” by grabbing a giant pair of sunglasses as they bounced across the ring in 1989’s *WrestleMania* Nintendo game. How realistic have wrestling video games gotten? Word is that the next WWE release will include a button combination to artificially raise the volume on Roman Reigns’ cheers.

To enjoy this video game-

themed edition of “Quick Count,” press “start.”

HALF LIFE

It took some 15 years, but one of the most influential pro wrestlers of his generation, Samoa Joe, has finally made it to WWE—or at least its developmental system. Now there’s no time to waste.

At 36 years old, Joe is hardly the young, new sensation that he was when he joined TNA a decade ago. At an age and stage of his career

when many wrestlers end their WWE runs, Joe is just beginning what could be the most important chapter of his wrestling legacy.

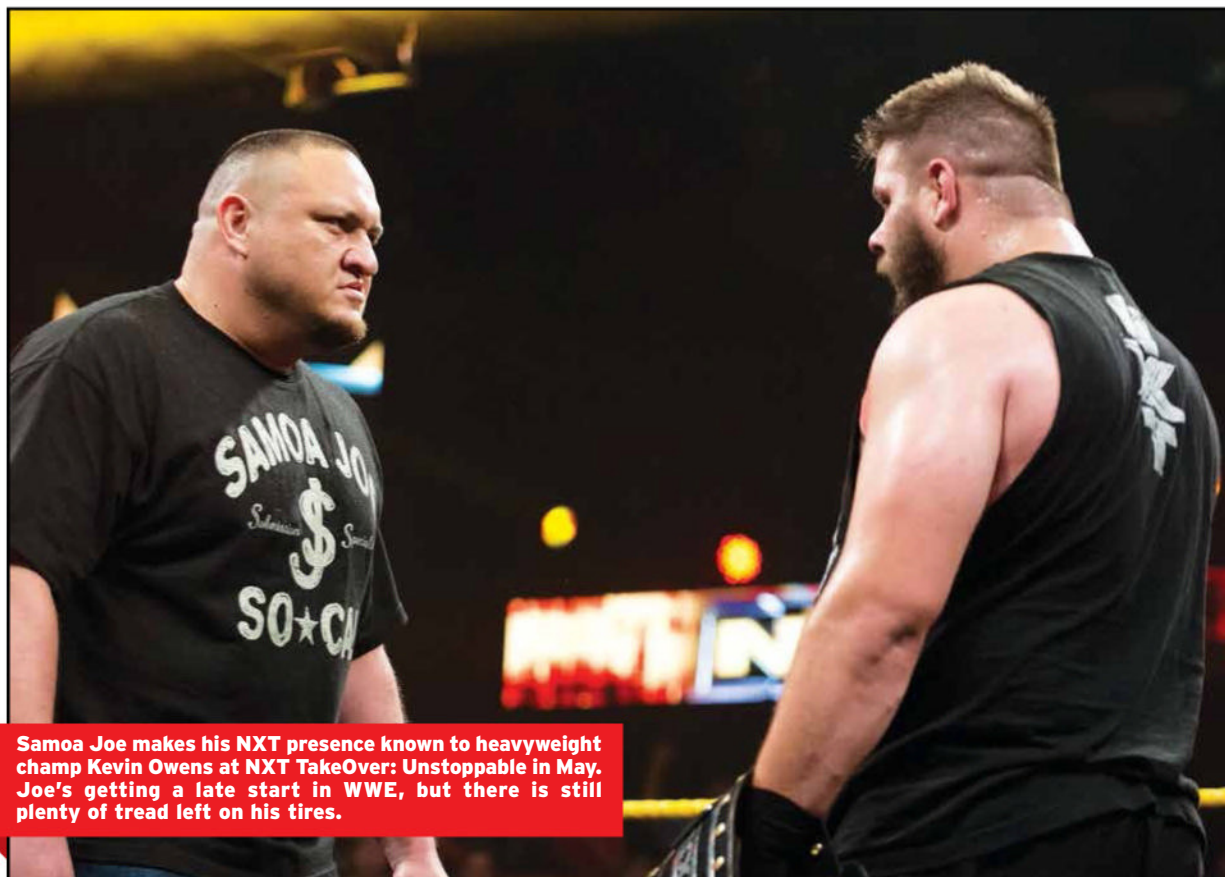
Fortunately for him, Joe’s relatively light TNA schedule has helped him preserve his health, and he appears to be in the best shape of his career. But, the reality is, even if all goes well, Joe’s WWE run is likely to be an abbreviated one.

However, if his past performances tell us anything, it’s that Joe could easily give fans a century’s worth of thrills in even a few short years, and leave WWE decision-makers wondering, “Why did we wait so long?”

CALL OF DUTY

While Joe’s WWE career appears to be at its beginning, that of one of his peers, Daniel Bryan, sadly appears to be at its end.

In the middle of his second prolonged injury hiatus in a year, an emotional Bryan announced to WWE fans on a May edition



Samoa Joe makes his NXT presence known to heavyweight champ Kevin Owens at NXT TakeOver: Unstoppable in May. Joe’s getting a late start in WWE, but there is still plenty of tread left on his tires.

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of *Monday Night Raw* that he “might never be able to wrestle again.”

As tragic as Bryan’s story is, it should also serve as a cautionary tale to a generation of performers who view wrestling as more obligation than occupation. Years after making it to WWE’s main-event scene, Bryan refused to take his foot off the gas pedal even a little bit—defiantly putting his health on the line with maneuvers, like his top rope headbutt, that he should have abandoned years ago.

As admirable as his drive is, fans surely would have traded a few less dangerous Bryan moves per match for a few extra years of Bryan matches.

DESTINY

I’d never wish for any wrestling promotion to go out of business. But I do wish for all wrestling promotions to get what they deserve.

To that end, I found a certain cosmic justice in the news that Ring of Honor had been picked up by Destination America, just around the same time that rumors began surfacing of the cable channel’s intention to cancel TNA’s *Impact Wrestling* later this year.

In the 13-plus years that both companies have been around, Ring of Honor has steadily built a reputation for wrestling excellence at the same time that TNA has tripped over its own feet time and again with one poor management decision after the next. But while ROH has struggled at times to keep its doors open, TNA has been kept afloat and largely unaccountable.

For years now, fans have wondered how much better off the sport would be if ROH got the same national exposure that TNA has. Now, we get a chance to find out.

WARCRAFT

As fans debate what secondary



With a prominent spot in TNA Creative, *Smashing Pumpkins* frontman Billy Corgan (posing with PWI photographer George Napolitano at the 2011 Cauliflower Alley Club Reunion) will bring to the mix a nuanced approach to working crowds.

promotion is the most likely to make a splash on the national wrestling landscape, they would be wise not to count out one dark horse candidate—Global Force Wrestling.

It’s true that, as of press time, GFW has yet to even hold its first event, much less finalize the kind of national television deal that is essential in becoming a real player in the industry. But, if there’s anyone who is up for a good, old-fashioned wrestling promotional war, it’s GFW founder Jeff Jarrett.

The second-generation wrestler and wrestling promoter grew up watching his father, Jerry Jarrett, battle outlaw Memphis promotions for fans and talent. As an adult, Jarrett was front and center for the Monday Night War between WCW and WWF, and used the animosity between the two groups to leverage lucrative runs in both companies. In 2002, he founded TNA and helped build it into the second biggest wrestling promotion in the U.S.

Now, with TNA struggling to stay alive, the race for number two is, once again, wide open. And you

better believe Jarrett has the smarts and the will to once again become a national force—if not a global one.

SONIC

Even if you’re not yet sold on what Billy Corgan can bring to TNA as a creative mind, you should be sold on what he can bring as a bona fide rock star.

Although he may have never learned how to properly execute a collar and elbow tie-up, Corgan’s experience as frontman of one of the most popular rock bands of the 1990s, the Smashing Pumpkins, is invaluable.

Who else in TNA knows what it’s like to perform in front of 100,000 rabid fans? Who has more experience manipulating an audience—bringing them down at just the right time with an acoustic ballad, then bringing them to their feet with a grinding guitar riff?

Whether music, wrestling, acting, or painting, art is all about touching an audience on an emotional level. And anyone who thinks Corgan doesn’t know a thing or two about doing that must have never listened to *Mellon Collie And The Infinite Sadness*. □

the STRAIGHT SHOOTER

BY DAN MURPHY

WHEN JUSHIN LIGER'S entrance music hits, I get goosebumps.

That's not an empty expression; I literally get goosebumps all over my arms and the hairs on my neck stand up. If you are fortunate enough to see Liger in person, you can feel the electricity in the air. He has a charisma and presence that is matched by only a very few of the all-time greats.

On April 13, I was able to see Liger defend his NWA junior heavyweight championship against Steve Anthony at the 50th Cauliflower

Alley Club Reunion in Las Vegas. Liger had won the title from Chase Owens and had successfully defended it multiple times in Japan, infuriating NWA President Bruce Tharpe, who wanted to have his championship back on American soil. So determined was Tharpe to achieve his goal that he interfered liberally throughout the match. In the end, Anthony also capitalized on interference from two-time former NWA champion Rob Conway and won the title.

The following day, I received a rare opportunity to sit down with

Liger and chat about his remarkable career. Liger started wrestling in 1984 ... that's 31 years ago! He won New Japan's Young Lions Cup tournament the same year Seth Rollins was born. Liger is the only man ever to appear in every single "PWI 500" since its inception in 1991. And this is a high-flyer whose body has managed to hold up after three decades of moonsaults, suicide dives, and shooting star presses.

Liger speaks limited English, but thanks in part to Google's translation app, we were able to understand each other.

"I'm sore," Liger said, when I asked about how he was feeling as he neared his 51st birthday. "Every day I am a little more tired. But I'm not ready to stop. I like my life wrestling. No, I *love* my life wrestling. No plans to retire. I want to keep going."

Underneath his mask, Liger sports two cauliflower ears, acquired during his days wrestling in high school. He said the gnarled ears are a badge of honor.



NWA President Bruce Tharpe does his part in making sure Jushin Liger does not return to Japan with his company's junior heavyweight title. Liger won't fret losing the belt to Steve Anthony in Las Vegas; he has another 5-10 years left in his career to get it back.

PHOTO BY MIKE LANG



A day later, at the Cauliflower Alley Club Reunion, Liger is in good spirits as he poses with two of his favorites, former AWA World champion Stan Hansen (left) and former NWA World champion Terry Funk.

"In high school, people saw my ears. They know I was a wrestler." He crossed his arms over his chest and puffed up his chest with pride and flashed a look-at-me grin. "That's right. I'm a wrestler. I'm a tough guy."

Surprisingly, Liger's wrestling hero wasn't a Japanese star like Giant Baba, Rikidozan, or Antonio Inoki. It was former NWA World champion Terry Funk.

In one of the great moments that you can only get at the CAC reunions, almost immediately after we concluded our interview, Liger bumped into Funk as Terry was making his way to the elevator at the Gold Coast Hotel. After they visited for a bit, I found myself on the elevator with Funk, and I told him about Liger calling Funk his hero.

"I'm *his* hero? Hell, he's *my* hero!" Funk said. "That guy has done everything!"

Former WCW booker Kevin Sullivan concurred. "When we did the first episode of *Nitro* [in 1995], I made sure that the first guy who wrestled that night was Jushin

Liger, because WWE didn't have anything like him. We took it to them right away."

Liger credits his longevity to healthy living and a disciplined workout routine, including ring work, squats, Jiu Jitsu, and weight training.

"A lot of sleep, eating good healthy foods, and training. No alcohol," he said.

In the mid-1990s, Liger underwent brain surgery to remove a cancerous tumor. He also came back from a badly broken leg that he incurred while attempting a baseball slide. Other than that, he has remained mostly injury-free, which is remarkable considering his high-risk style.

When I informed him that he was the only person ever to be ranked in every "*PW/500*," he was speechless. Not even Google could help him come up with the right words to express himself. He merely tented his hands and bowed deeply, saying, "Thank you."

Liger also said he was extremely happy to be working with the NWA, a promotion that has had a

storied past in Japan. It was the company where Terry Funk worked, as well as some of his other favorites, including Harley Race and Jack Brisco.

"With the Japanese people, the NWA is number one," Liger said. Currently, two of New Japan's top stars, Hiroyoshi Tenzan and Satoshi Kojima, are feuding over the NWA heavyweight title.

It's really incredible. Liger is an electrifying performer, and yet he is also soft-spoken, genuinely humble, and appreciative.

"With the mask," he said, "I am Jushin Liger. Without the mask, I am no longer Jushin Liger. I am me. We are two different people."

Liger is truly a credit to wrestling. He is one of the most influential performers of the modern era. He has won more than 40 championships. And, according to him, he hopes to have another five or 10 years ahead of him. Though he doesn't fly quite as high as he did in the 1990s, he remains agile, graceful, and magical to watch.

Keep the goosebumps coming, Liger-san. □

WIN, LOSE, or DRAW

BY HARRY BURKETT

WE EXPECTED TO receive plenty of mail after Publisher Stu Saks announced that *PWI* would recognize the WWE championship as the sport's only world heavyweight title. Of course, that recognition came at the expense of the TNA championship, which is now viewed on roughly the same level as the Ring of Honor and New Japan IWGP championships.

While Stu was careful to point out this decision was not meant solely as an indictment of TNA (although there is some question over whether or not Destination America will air *Impact Wrestling* in the upcoming fall season), it was simply a recognition of the WWE title's 50-year heritage and the unparalleled global reach of WWE as a company. It was done for all the right reasons.

But we still expected an onslaught of criticism, both from TNA and many of our readers.

Now may be a good time for you to flip over to "Between Falls (page 78)," where we printed an e-mail exchange between Stu and 27-year old Rob Lord of Torquay, England. Rob asserts that our "once-proud magazine has finally knelt before Vince" and that he is stripping *PWI* of "worth-reading" status!

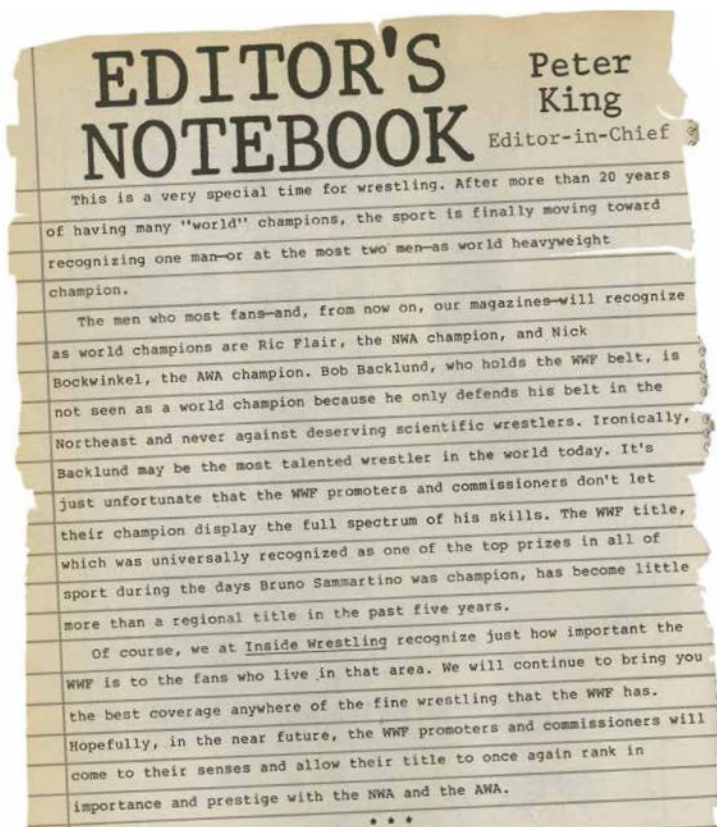
Despite that stinging criticism, we appreciate that level of passion among our readers. There was plenty of discussion among our magazine's editors and writers. Dan Murphy and Al Castle were

solidly behind the idea from the start, noting that allowing the TNA championship to enjoy world-title status was unfair to ROH and particularly New Japan. My first instinct was to grant world title status to ROH and New Japan because I didn't want WWE depicted as wrestling's major league while the other promotions were treated as the minors. Mike Bessler took a similar stance, but I would describe the rest of the staff as leaning more toward Dan and Al's position.

And Stu's tendency has been to simplify the world-title situation, not muddle up the picture even more.

So when a reader such as Rob Lord fires off a passionate e-mail, we understand. This issue of world title status has been ongoing for over 30 years. Prior to that, it was not a hot-button topic. In fact, *PWI* didn't even necessarily refer to the NWA, AWA, and WWF champions as "world champions." Harley Race, Nick Bockwinkel, and Bob Backlund were loosely referred to as world champions, though it was widely understood that the magazine regarded their titles as equally significant.

That changed in 1983, when *PWI* announced it would recognize the NWA's Ric Flair and the AWA's Nick Bockwinkel as wrestling's only world champions, and that the WWF title would be considered a regional championship. So what was all that about? Wasn't the WWF gearing up for national expansion at that time?

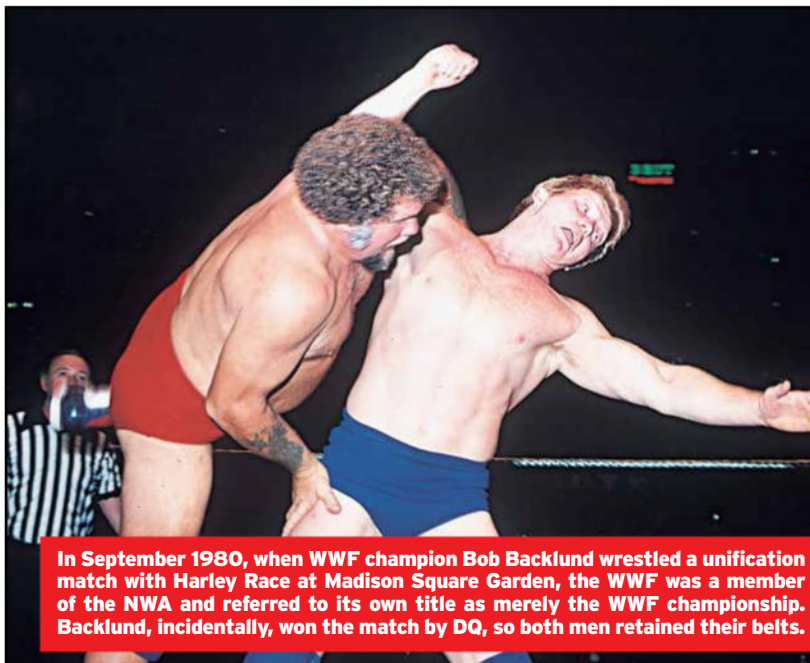


Editor-in-Chief Peter King's column in the August 1983 edition of *Inside Wrestling* addressed our family of magazines' new position on the WWF's world title status.

One must consider the political environment. Vince McMahon's WWF was raiding talent from the top territories, persuading local TV stations across the country to carry his programming at the expense of local promotions, and tightly restricting *PWI*'s ability to cover the WWF. At the same time, the NWA and AWA World titles were traditionally defended more like world heavyweight championships, unlike the WWF title.

The NWA had existed since 1948 and the roots of its world championship could be traced back to 1905. The alliance—at its peak in the 1980s—had over 40 affiliates, reaching every corner of the globe, from the U.S. and the Caribbean, to the Orient, Australia, and New Zealand. Flair was a traveling champion working a grueling schedule, defending his title around the world. The AWA also had global reach, with Bockwinkel recognized in many wrestling capitals beyond its traditional confines of Minnesota, including Memphis, Denver, Houston, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Toronto, and Montreal. And while the WWF did have an occasional working relationship with New Japan, both the NWA and AWA championships were more of a presence on All Japan cards.

For 20 years, the WWF championship was rarely defended outside its Northeast stronghold. On the rare occasion the WWF championship was defended outside the Northeast, the challenger was just another wrestler from the WWF. When Bob Backlund made a rare swing through Texas, for example, he didn't defend the WWF title against Texas stars such as Junkyard Dog, Butch Reed, Jim Duggan, or Kamala. Instead, he defended the title against Afa the Wild Samoan, a tag team wrestler who wasn't even ranked in the WWF's top 10. "Those Samoans are tough, espe-



In September 1980, when WWF champion Bob Backlund wrestled a unification match with Harley Race at Madison Square Garden, the WWF was a member of the NWA and referred to its own title as merely the WWF championship. Backlund, incidentally, won the match by DQ, so both men retained their belts.

cially the 12th or 14th time around," quipped *PWI* in its "Year In Review" for 1983.

Another major rationale for not recognizing the WWF championship as a world title was the issue of scientific wrestlers vs. rulebreakers. That sounds quaint in retrospect, but it was a fact. In the WWF, scientific wrestlers almost never wrestled each other and rulebreakers rarely wrestled each other. The big exception was the 1973 clash between WWWF champion Pedro Morales and Bruno Sammartino at New York's Shea Stadium. Yet Chief Jay Strongbow never got the shot at Bruno he deserved, and Backlund was roundly criticized for not defending against Jimmy Snuka, Tito Santana, and several others.

When Flair and Bockwinkel came to town, they were usually heels defending against the hometown heroes, but they did defend their belts against rulebreakers if the occasion warranted it.

Even Vincent J. McMahon, still a member of the NWA board, rarely referred to the WWF championship as a world title, although WWF ring announcers always introduced Harley Race as the NWA "World" heavyweight cham-

pion when he made a rare appearance in Madison Square Garden.

I can imagine the mindset inside the *PWI* offices at the time. If the WWF had declared war on the rest of the industry, why should *PWI* go out of its way to grant respectability to its championship when there were compelling reasons not to do so? Many traditionalists agreed with the assessment that Flair and Bockwinkel were traveling world champions and Backlund was merely a regional/company champion. As a reader, I respected *PWI* for its bold stand.

By 1985, however, the WWF's national expansion was unprecedented and its increasing success was undeniable. So *PWI* invited its readers to decide the issue. About 60 percent of respondents agreed that Hulk Hogan should be recognized as the WWF *World* heavyweight champion and that Mike Rotundo and Barry Windham should be recognized as WWF *World* tag team champions.

Now the situation has come full circle. *PWI* now recognizes WWE titleholder Seth Rollins as the industry's only world heavyweight champion. Somewhere, Bob Backlund must feel vindicated. □

PRESS CONFERENCE

EVERY ISSUE, REPORTERS FROM PWI PARTICIPATE IN AN INCISIVE PRESS CONFERENCE WITH A TOP WRESTLING STAR. THE QUESTIONS WILL BE DEMANDING, AND THE ANSWERS WILL REVEAL THE INNERMOST THOUGHTS OF THE GIANTS OF THE SPORT.



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EXPERT RECRUITERS OFFERING advice on how to land a dream job will often reference the “Three P’s” of winning over a prospective employer—personality, presentation, and professionalism.

Kevin Owens somehow landed his dream job boasting three very different P’s: a pot belly, a pale complexion, and a very politically incorrect attitude.

In fact, there was almost nothing about the former Kevin Steen that would have appeared to make him a good fit for the highly polished, highly corporate atmosphere of WWE. Nothing, that is, except for the fact that, for several years, he had been widely regarded as one of the very best performers in the wrestling business.

Pro Wrestling Guerrilla fans came to realize that fact when the Quebec native won the first of three heavyweight titles in the California-based promotion in 2012. Ring of Honor fans came to realize it a year later, when the man they dubbed “Mr. Wrestling” unseated Davey Richards for the ROH title and defended it for 11 months. And, **PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED**’s staff knew it when we slotted Steen in the Top 10 of the 2013 “**PWI 500**” rankings.

But, were it not for WWE scout William Regal witnessing Steen’s unique blend of smashmouth wrestling technique and foulmouthed microphone technique in person during a PWG event, most WWE fans may never have been exposed to the man.

As it was, he signed a developmental contract with WWE in 2014 and rebranded himself Kevin Owens. In his first televised appearance, he rekindled his storied rivalry with former best friend Sami Zayn (El Generico). A few weeks later, Owens beat Zayn for the NXT title. Since then, Owens has led NXT as it has generated unprecedented buzz for combining WWE’s sleek presentation with the kind of high-energy athleticism typically reserved for independent wrestling promotions. **PWI** Senior Editor Al Castle caught up with Owens weeks prior to the biggest win of his life, a pinfall of John Cena at Elimination Chamber. “At the time we spoke,” Castle said, “he was very envious of Sami Zayn, who got his break on **Raw** before he did.”

It was clear that he was hungry to get his chance to prove himself, and soon he’d do just that.

Castle: *Raw* was in your hometown, Montreal, Monday night. And it was a big night for someone you have history with, Sami Zayn, who got to work with John Cena. What was that like for you to see him get that spot? Was it a feeling of pride, seeing a guy you came up with get that opportunity? Or was there any bit of you wishing it was you in there?

Owens: Oh, every bit of me wishes it was me. All I could think of was how much better it would have been if I was there. It was good to see him there. Good for him. But I should have been the one to do that. I would have loved to make it to *Raw* in Montreal before him, let alone to wrestle John Cena. I'm not going to hide that. But it was surreal to see.

Castle: On the topic of Sami Zayn, when you debuted on NXT, they moved you right into a feud with him, which was pretty unprecedented. It was the first time that I could think of that, essentially, an indy feud carried into WWE. What do you think it says about the history and chemistry that you two have that made WWE jump on so quickly?

Owens: I think it's a logical step. We really didn't give them a choice, because everything we've done together speaks for itself. It's what people want to see. "Best for business" has become a catchphrase on *Raw*, but really, if you have both of us in the same universe, there's no reason why this shouldn't happen. I think, from the start, as soon as I got signed to WWE, that's what needed to happen.

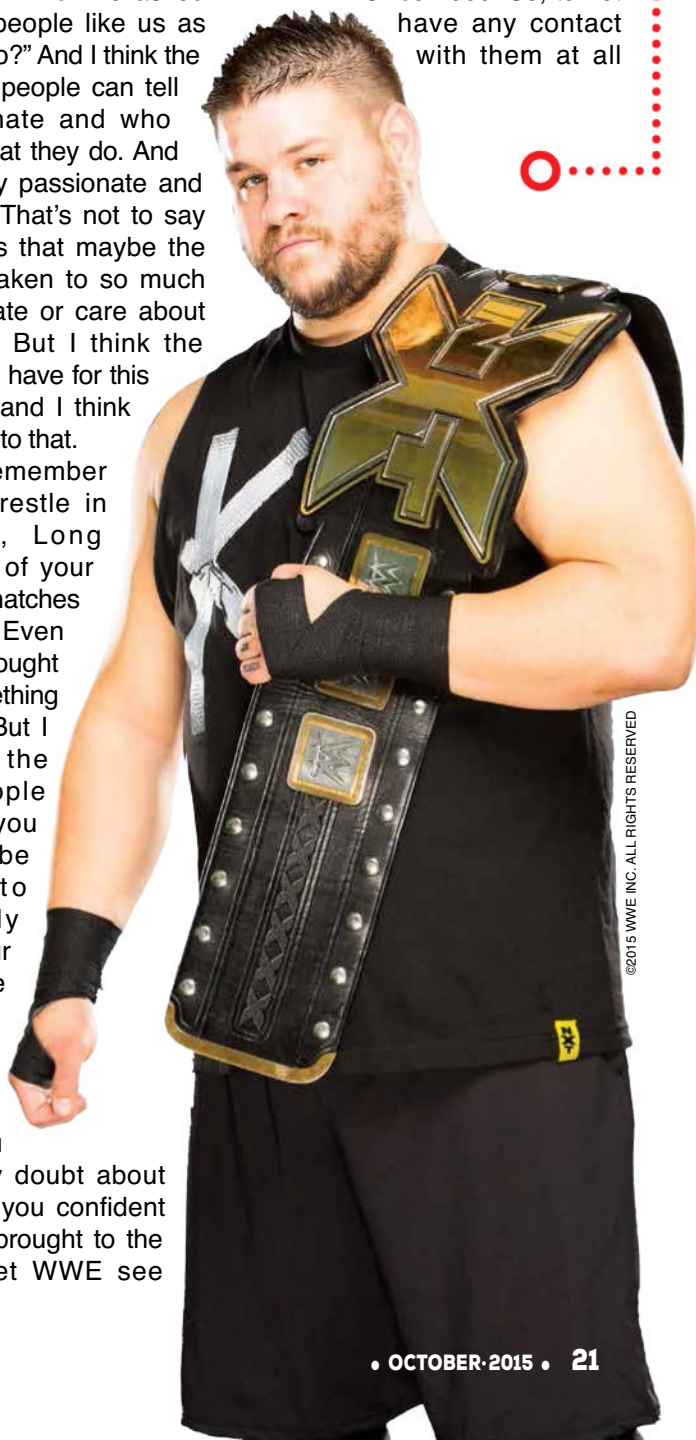
Castle: Why do you think you and Sami Zayn have been such a hot ticket for so many years? I

remember ROH headlined its biggest show of the year, Final Battle 2012, with you two years after your feud had begun. Now three years after that, it's still raging on.

Owens: When we used to travel on the road together years ago before we got to WWE, I remember one specific conversation in which he asked me, "Why do people like us as much as they do?" And I think the answer is that people can tell who's passionate and who cares about what they do. And we're both very passionate and we care a lot. That's not to say that performers that maybe the crowd hasn't taken to so much aren't passionate or care about what they do. But I think the passion that we have for this is undeniable, and I think people connect to that.

Castle: I remember seeing you wrestle in Lake Grove, Long Island, in one of your earliest ROH matches back in 2006. Even back then, I thought there was something special there. But I was also in the camp of people who thought you would never be brought into WWE if only because of your appearance and not having the typical body type that WWE looks for. Did you ever have any doubt about that? Or were you confident that what you brought to the table would let WWE see past that?

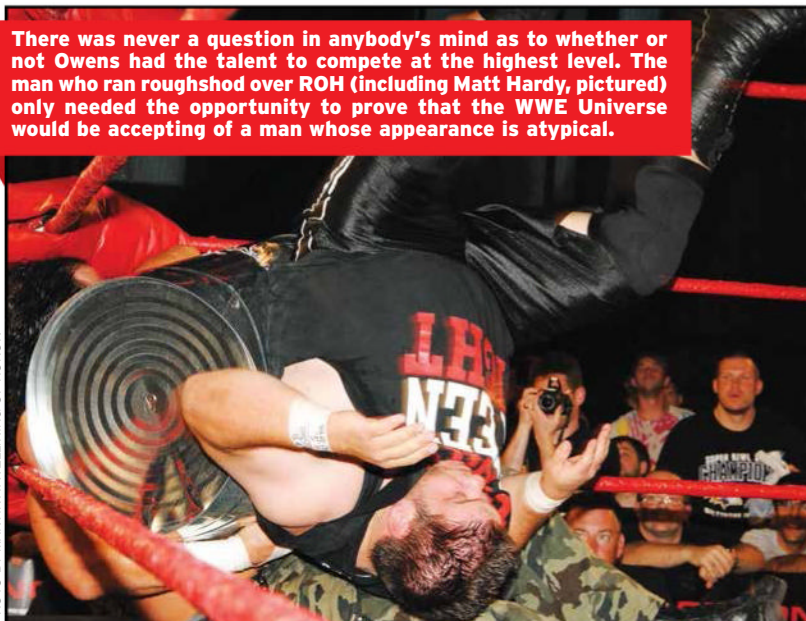
Owens: At one point I did think this would never happen for me, but not because of my look. It was just because of my situation, my family. I have a wife and kids and was doing well on the independent scene. And I never had any contact with WWE until 2013. And I had been wrestling since 2000. So, to not have any contact with them at all



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There was never a question in anybody's mind as to whether or not Owens had the talent to compete at the highest level. The man who ran roughshod over ROH (including Matt Hardy, pictured) only needed the opportunity to prove that the WWE Universe would be accepting of a man whose appearance is atypical.

PHOTO BY MARVIN AT WELLS RING OF HONOR



for 13 years, it weighs on your mind, I suppose. And eventually, I think I accepted, "Okay. This just isn't going to happen," even though it had always been my dream and my goal. But I don't think the way I looked ever hindered me. Maybe that's why it took them 13 years to reach out. Maybe if I had been jacked and ripped, they would have reached out after six years. I don't know. But if I was ripped and tan and had a six-pack, I wouldn't be who I am. I think the appeal with me is that I'm different. And I'm proud to be different. Some people might see it as a disadvantage, but it's what got me here. Who I am is what got me here, because I've never been anything else but me. So WWE saw something in that. And even in those years when they never got in contact with me, I knew they had to have noticed me. And eventually the right person, who was William Regal, was at the right place, which was PWG in California. And he saw the right thing from me to feel like he could stick his neck out for me. He got me a tryout. And I got myself a spot. And the rest is history. I became the NXT champion two months after my

debut. If that doesn't speak volumes about my ability—regardless of how I look—I don't know what will.

Castle: You mentioned being a family man. How many kids do you have?

Owens: I have two—a boy and a girl. My daughter just turned 1 a couple weeks ago, and my son is 7.

Castle: So this decision to join WWE must have had a big impact on them, as well. I know the travel demands can be very

hectic, especially if and when you move into the main roster. Is that something that weighs on you?

Owens: Yes, of course. My family is very supportive of what I do. My wife's been just incredible. When I'm not there, she takes care of two kids. That's never easy when you have two parents, let alone when you're by yourself for a few days. But they're all used to it. When I was an independent, I would leave for three or four days a week. Now it's been different for the last few months because, as part of NXT, I go to the Performance Center every day and we have live events in Florida every weekend. But I'm home every night and I'm home every morning. I see my wife and kids every day. And that's very nice, and we're making the best of it. But traveling is part of what I do and they understand and they know how passionate I am about this. So they're nothing but supportive. It's also really important that when my son is at school and somebody asks him what his dad does, I want him to be proud. And I think he's very proud of what I am.

I remember taking him to live events back in Montreal when I



It was NXT Commissioner William Regal (officiating the contract signing between Owens and then-NXT champ Sami Zayn) that took notice of Kevin at a Pro Wrestling Guerrilla show in California and recommended he be given a tryout.

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wasn't part of WWE. He would ask me, "When are you going to wrestle there?" He didn't know where I worked. All he knew is that I was a wrestler, so how come I wasn't wrestling in WWE? So I would have to tell him, "I don't know. Maybe one day." Now he gets to see me do it. He was there for my first WWE live event in Tampa, back in February, in front of 9,000 people. My parents, my wife, both my children were there. That was something really incredible to share with them, because it was something I had been waiting to happen for 14 years. To see how proud he was the night I brought the NXT title home, those are moments I'll never forget. And there are many more moments like that ahead, and that's all thanks to how supportive they are.

Castle: I know some fans look at a guy like you, who was already very seasoned and acclaimed, and are bothered to see you have to go through developmental. I remember the backlash against WWE when they put Daniel Bryan in developmental, even though he had long been considered one of the best wrestlers in the world by a lot of people. What was your attitude toward it? Did you believe there was more to learn?

Owens: There's always more to learn. NXT is a wealth of knowledge, like nothing else in

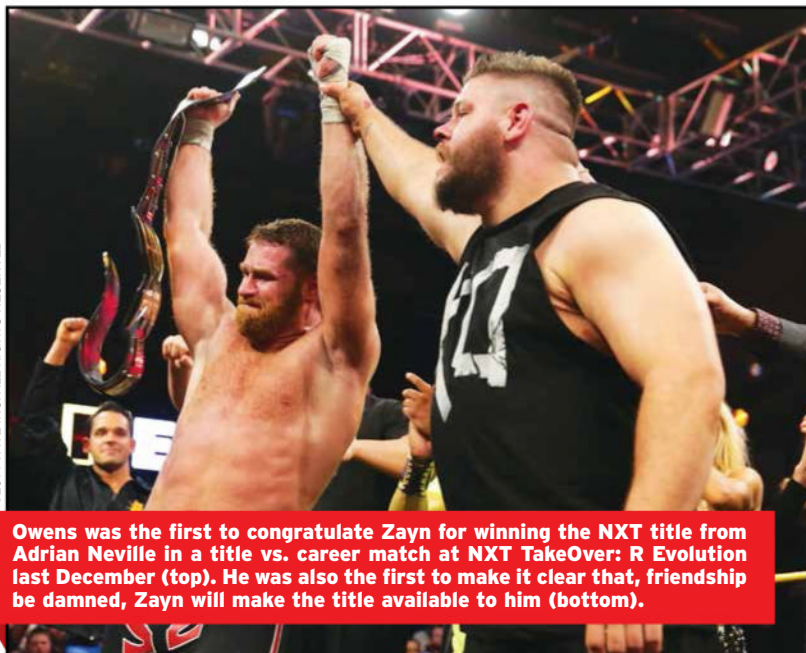


The Kevin Steen-El Generico feud of Ring of Honor vintage is alive and well in NXT as Owens vs. Zayn. It's a testament to the resilience and will of these two men that they have a desire to inflict more punishment on one another after what they've been through together.

wrestling. Just when I walked into the Performance Center this morning, I had Matt Bloom, who not only was in WWE for several years, but also in Japan for several years, teaching a class; I had Robbie Brookside, who has wrestled all over England and the world; I had Norman Smiley, who has wrestled all over the world, and specifically, in Mexico; Sara

Del Rey, who is one of the top female wrestlers anywhere, still; Billy Gunn, who has been at the top in WWE; Dusty Rhodes, who is the best talker there's ever been and is there to help people with their communication skills. So, if you walk in there and you don't learn, it's because your attitude is wrong. There's no doubt about that. Triple-H has

"WE'RE NOT BEING FORCED TO 'STAY DOWN IN NXT.' WE'RE NOT 'DOWN' ANYWHERE. WE'RE IN NXT. AND RIGHT NOW NXT IS THE HOTTEST THING IN THE INDUSTRY."



Owens was the first to congratulate Zayn for winning the NXT title from Adrian Neville in a title vs. career match at NXT TakeOver: R Evolution last December (top). He was also the first to make it clear that, friendship be damned, Zayn will make the title available to him (bottom).

said in the past that this isn't developmental anymore, and I believe that. I've seen it. It's not. The reason why me and Hideo Itami and Finn Balor were brought in and put in NXT isn't just because we can learn more. Of course we can learn more. Everybody can. John Cena would tell you he can learn more. Shawn Michaels told me a couple of weeks ago that he still learns. But I think we were put in NXT because they want NXT to get as big as it can. And I think we're an integral part of making that happen. I think people who are bitter about us being there have to change their outlook, because what we're doing is creating something incredible. We're not being forced to "stay down in NXT." We're happy to be here. We're not "down" anywhere. We're in NXT. And right now NXT is the hottest thing in the industry.

Castle: I think you're right. NXT is, right now, attracting a type of fan even WWE doesn't necessarily get. Now NXT is going on the road, and really evolving into something more than a developmental system. Some people raise concerns

about whether that's the right thing for everyone. Some of these people do need some more seasoning. They're not ready for prime time. I've heard concerns about pay. If NXT becomes a legit third brand, and not just a minor league system, does WWE have to start paying the talent as such? It's all to say: What do you think about the overall direction of where NXT is going?

Owens: It's nice for people to be concerned about pay, but we're taken care of. We're all very happy. We wouldn't be here if we

weren't. And it's on us to keep making things bigger so that we get more profit out of it, and we are. That's been acknowledged. As far as people being seasoned, going on the road will help a person who doesn't have that much experience get more experience. Throwing somebody in front of 5,000 people who has never been in front of 5,000 people might be a little scary, but they need to do it eventually. Sometimes, baptism by fire is the best way to go. But we're at the Performance Center every single day. And people who need to work on some things are working on those things. I think NXT growing the way it has, more than anything, is motivating people. We have people at NXT who weren't necessarily wrestling fans their whole lives. They didn't dream about this their whole lives, but maybe fell into it for one reason or another. So they might need work here or there. Everybody does. And those people are well aware of it, and are working toward those things. And they have the best resources available to anyone in the industry to get better. So I think those concerns are unjustified. Everybody's really proud of what NXT is becoming.





Owens was not a fan of Alex Riley, goading him away from the NXT announce table and back into the ring. The two have met on three occasions, with Owens winning each time.

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Castle: Is it kind of a double-edged sword that, the more successful that NXT becomes, the more reluctance there may be in moving you into the main WWE roster, because you're such a big part of NXT and they kind of need you there?

Owens: The thing is, I want to make my time in NXT count. I want to make it as memorable as possible. Once I've done that, I'm going to move into the main roster. And that's another term I don't like to use. Because now NXT is a third brand, and we are part of the main roster. We're just on a different show. Some people might roll their eyes at that, but I don't care. I'm here. I see the work that we're doing. And I know that's a fact. There's people from the main roster who would love to come to NXT. They want to be there. They want to wrestle in front of these crowds. Seth Rollins, on the biggest weekend of his life, WrestleMania weekend, came to San Jose to watch NXT, when he could have been getting rest or doing anything else. That speaks

volumes as far as what NXT is now. So I'm not worried about when I'll "move up." I hate saying that. I'm not worried when I'll move to *Raw* and *Smackdown*. I'll move there when it's time. As far as whether NXT needs me: There's people in NXT that fans aren't even aware of that will rock their world when they see them. We have so many guys who have such promise and potential. When myself, Tyler Breeze, Sami Zayn, Finn Balor, and Hideo Itami, just to name a few, are all gone, there's going to be plenty of people to take those spots. And NXT will keep growing.

Castle: You said Dusty Rhodes was the all-time greatest talker. In the last several years, you've been in the conversation for that distinction. How big a part of the Kevin Owens package is your ability to talk? And did you have kind of an epiphany moment one day: "Hey, I'm good at this."

Owens: Yeah. Steve Austin gave me that epiphany moment. I met him at an airport in 2005, randomly, as we were traveling

to a show. He was going home to Los Angeles. And I was the biggest Steve Austin fan in the world. I know that's cliché, but I was. I would rival anyone who claimed at one point he was the biggest Steve Austin fan in the world. It was me. And when I saw him, I had to ask him a question. We talked a bit about wrestling. And I told him I was a wrestler. And I asked him, "Before you get on that flight, do you have any advice for me?" And he said, "Just run your mouth. Never stop running your mouth." And that's what I started doing that weekend. The next day, I started running my mouth during my matches. I started running my mouth on the microphone. I started making that part of who I am, and it absolutely changed everything about me. It helped me get to a whole different level. And the one thing that convinced WWE officials to give me a tryout was one promo. So it's absolutely going to be a part of who I am forever. □



PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN

ROH NEW JAPAN FACEOFF

WHICH PROMOTION HAS THE EDGE?

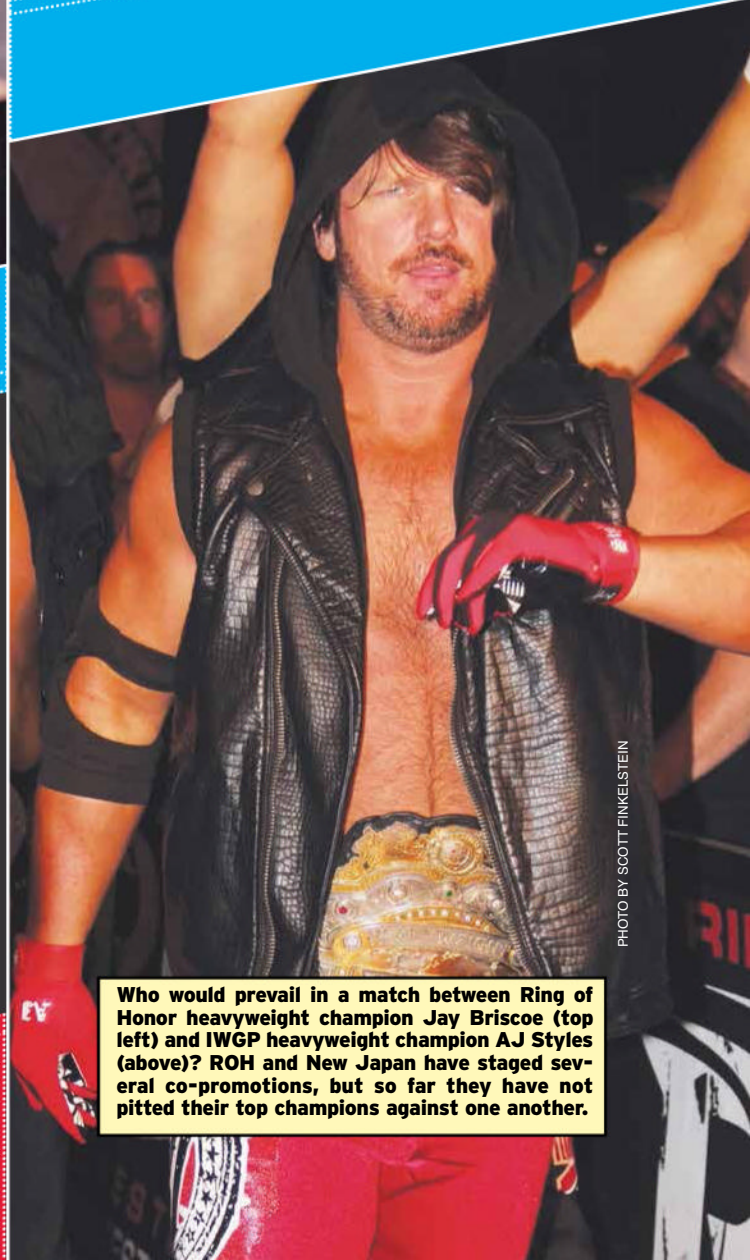


PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN

THE FOUR RECENT
RING OF HONOR-
NEW JAPAN SHOWS
WERE SPECTACULAR.
BUT WE HAVE A
SUGGESTION TO
MAKE THE NEXT
JOINT PROMOTION
EVEN BETTER!

TEXT BY DAN MURPHY

Who would prevail in a match between Ring of Honor heavyweight champion Jay Briscoe (top left) and IWGP heavyweight champion AJ Styles (above)? ROH and New Japan have staged several co-promotions, but so far they have not pitted their top champions against one another.

FOR THE PAST two years, Ring of Honor has maintained a fruitful relationship with the top wrestling company in Japan, New Japan Pro Wrestling. Frequently, stars from the two promotions travel to the other side of the globe, and the response from both U.S. and Japanese fans has been overwhelmingly favorable.

The latest installments of the ROH/New Japan collaboration took place on May 12-13, with “War Of The Worlds” in Philadelphia, and May 15-16, when the wrestlers traveled 500 miles north to present “Global Wars” in Toronto.

All four cards were sellouts and the fans went home completely satisfied. With more co-promotions planned, *PWI* has a simple idea

that we think would not only put this great talent on display, but also add significance to the cards as a whole.

In the spirit of our old “*PWI* Faceoffs” section, we suggest that Ring of Honor and New Japan seed their top 10 wrestlers, 1-10, and then have a card of matches based on those seedings: 1 vs. 1, 2 vs. 2, 3 vs. 3, etc. A prize fund should be set aside for the winning promotion, with some sort of tiebreaker being set up in case of a 5-5 tie (e.g., shortest cumulative time of victories).

We couldn’t wait for a response to our suggestion from ROH and NJPW, so we went ahead and booked the matches ourselves. See if you agree with our seedings and predictions.

AJ STYLES vs. JAY BRISCOE

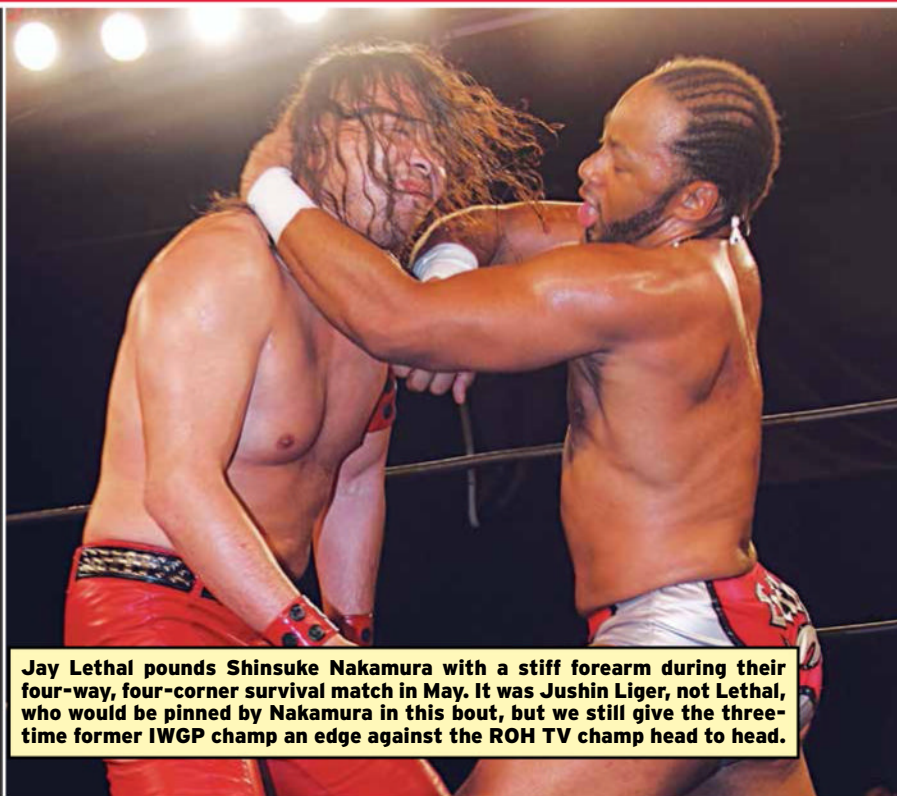
Briscoe is one of the few wrestlers who can match Styles’ aerial artistry, but can Styles go toe-to-toe in a slugfest with Briscoe? We don’t think so. Briscoe would keep Styles grounded long enough to administer a good, old-fashioned Sandy

Fork-style beating on the IWGP champion. Styles can be cocky; against Briscoe, that cockiness would be his downfall. Call it an upset, but we predict Briscoe would come out on top, most likely with a Jay-Driller piledriver.

WINNER: JAY BRISCOE

SHINSUKE NAKAMURA vs. JAY LETHAL

PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN



Jay Lethal pounds Shinsuke Nakamura with a stiff forearm during their four-way, four-corner survival match in May. It was Jushin Liger, not Lethal, who would be pinned by Nakamura in this bout, but we still give the three-time former IWGP champ an edge against the ROH TV champ head to head.

Lethal and Nakamura actually squared off as part of a four-way match on May 13. That match (which also included Jushin Liger and Mark Briscoe) was won by Nakamura, and we’d expect the same result if Nakamura faced Lethal in a singles bout. Lethal has an explosive offense, but Nakamura can land those incapacitating kneestrikes and kicks from anywhere. Lethal would do what he does—throw his body at Nakamura with reckless abandon—but he’d end up eating a Boma Ye kneesmash to knock him into la-la land.

WINNER: SHINSUKE NAKAMURA

HIROSHI TANAHASHI vs. RODERICK STRONG

Already a *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Famer, Tanahashi is widely considered to be one of the best wrestlers of his generation. Strong is a workhorse and a widely respected veteran, but he hasn't had anywhere near the championship success that Tanahashi has. On May 13, Tanahashi defeated Strong in one of the most highly praised bouts of the tour. That wasn't a fluke. Strong gave Tanahashi a great match, but Tanahashi is in a league of his own. If they wrestled 100 times, Tanahashi would win 90 ... and each match would be considered Match of the Night.



PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN

Though weakened by an early-match head cut, Roderick Strong wasn't looking for excuses for his loss to Hiroshi Tanahashi on Day 2 of "War Of The Worlds" in Philadelphia. With or without the cut, we give the high-flying Hall of Famer the advantage over Strong.

WINNER: HIROSHI TANAHASHI

KAZUCHIKA OKADA vs. MICHAEL ELGIN

"The Rainmaker" against "The Unbreakable One" promises to be a stiff, hard-hitting contest. Okada has the height advantage, but Elgin is the clear-cut favorite in the strength department. The key for an Elgin win would be for him to control the pace of the match and methodically wear down Okada with power

moves. Unfortunately, that's not Elgin's style. Elgin would likely trade big moves with Okada and give "The Rainmaker" room to connect with his storied dropkick and Rainmaker clothesline. It would probably take three or four Rainmakers to put Elgin down, but that's what would happen.

WINNER: KAZUCHIKA OKADA

HIROOKI GOTO vs. ADAM COLE

The NJPW Intercontinental champion and the former ROH champion are very different personalities. Goto is a suplex master with a bad attitude and a slew of submissions in his arsenal. Cole is a flamboyant heat magnet, but he's also an inno-

vative competitor with an unorthodox offense. It wouldn't take long for Cole to get under Goto's skin. The moment Goto let his anger or frustration get the best of him, Cole would strike with a superkick or flipping piledriver to steal the win.

WINNER: ADAM COLE

KENNY OMEGA vs. MARK BRISCOE

Mark Briscoe is most successful when he can explode with short bursts of offense and keep his opponent disoriented and on the defensive. The IWGP junior heavyweight champion wouldn't fall for

that. Omega is too crafty to wrestle Briscoe's style of match. "The Cleaner" would take his time and put Briscoe down for the count at about the 20-minute mark.

WINNER: KENNY OMEGA

TOGI MAKABE vs. ACH

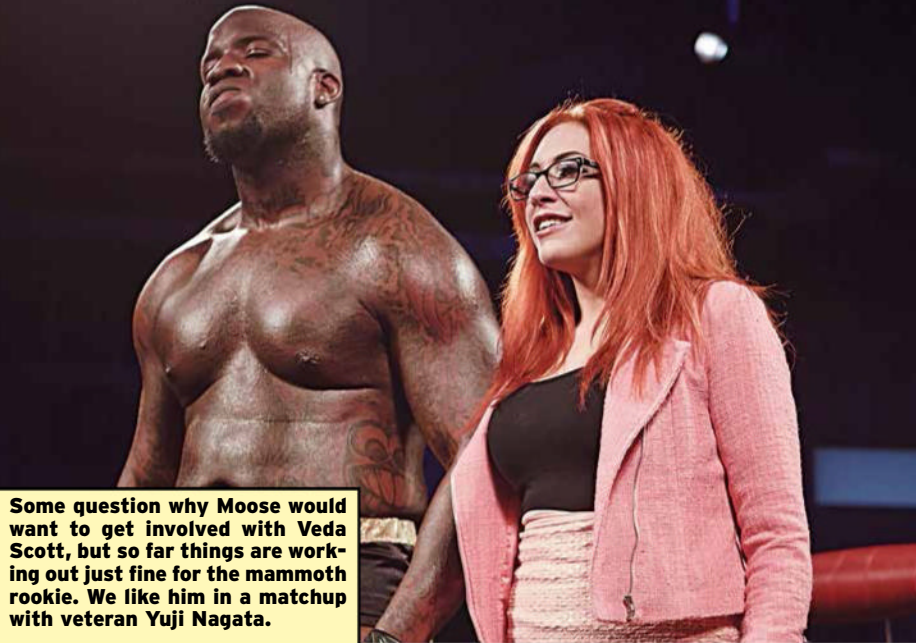
ACH was impressive in his May 15 bout against Nakamura, but Makabe is a very different opponent. Makabe outweighs ACH by more than 50 pounds

and has an additional decade of experience. ACH can flip and fly, but when caught by "The Gorilla," he'd be in for a world of hurt.

WINNER: TOGI MAKABE

YUJI NAGATA vs. MOOSE

PHOTO BY ANDREA KELLAWAY/RING OF HONOR



Some question why Moose would want to get involved with Veda Scott, but so far things are working out just fine for the mammoth rookie. We like him in a matchup with veteran Yuji Nagata.

Perhaps the most intriguing match pits former NFL journeyman Moose against veteran shootfighter Nagata. Nagata has a clear advantage in experience, but Moose is just a remarkable physical specimen. Sixteen years younger and nearly 60 pounds heavier, the big man from Atlanta would simply overwhelm Nagata, who has been susceptible to knockouts in his MMA career. We give this one to Moose by TKO.

WINNER: MOOSE

HIROYOSHI TENZAN vs. MICHAEL BENNETT

This bout pits the man who invented the Anaconda Vise against the man who claims to have perfected it. Tenzan is a 25-year veteran and one of the toughest wrestlers ever to step into the ring. Bennett is a

prodigy with a mean streak and a gorgeous lady in his corner. Bennett earned a lot of respect when he scored a win over Tanahashi last year. Beating Tenzan would not be nearly as difficult.

WINNER: MICHAEL BENNETT

JUSHIN LIGER vs. MATT TAVEN

These two met in a tag match on May 15, with Taven and Bennett beating Liger and Matt Sydal. In a straight singles match, we predict a different

outcome. Liger is a wrestling icon. Taven has promise, but Liger's experience, ring awareness, and superior mat game would give him the win.

WINNER: JUSHIN LIGER

FADED GLORY

IS WWE TRYING TO RESTORE PRESTIGE TO THE I-C AND U.S. TITLES?



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**WWE BREATHED NEW LIFE INTO THE
INTERCONTINENTAL AND UNITED STATES
CHAMPIONSHIPS AT WRESTLEMANIA 31.
OR WERE THESE SIMPLY FEEL-GOOD MOMENTS?
WE ASK WRESTLING'S MOST TRUSTED
INSIDER WHAT HE THINKS**

TEXT BY HARRY BURKETT

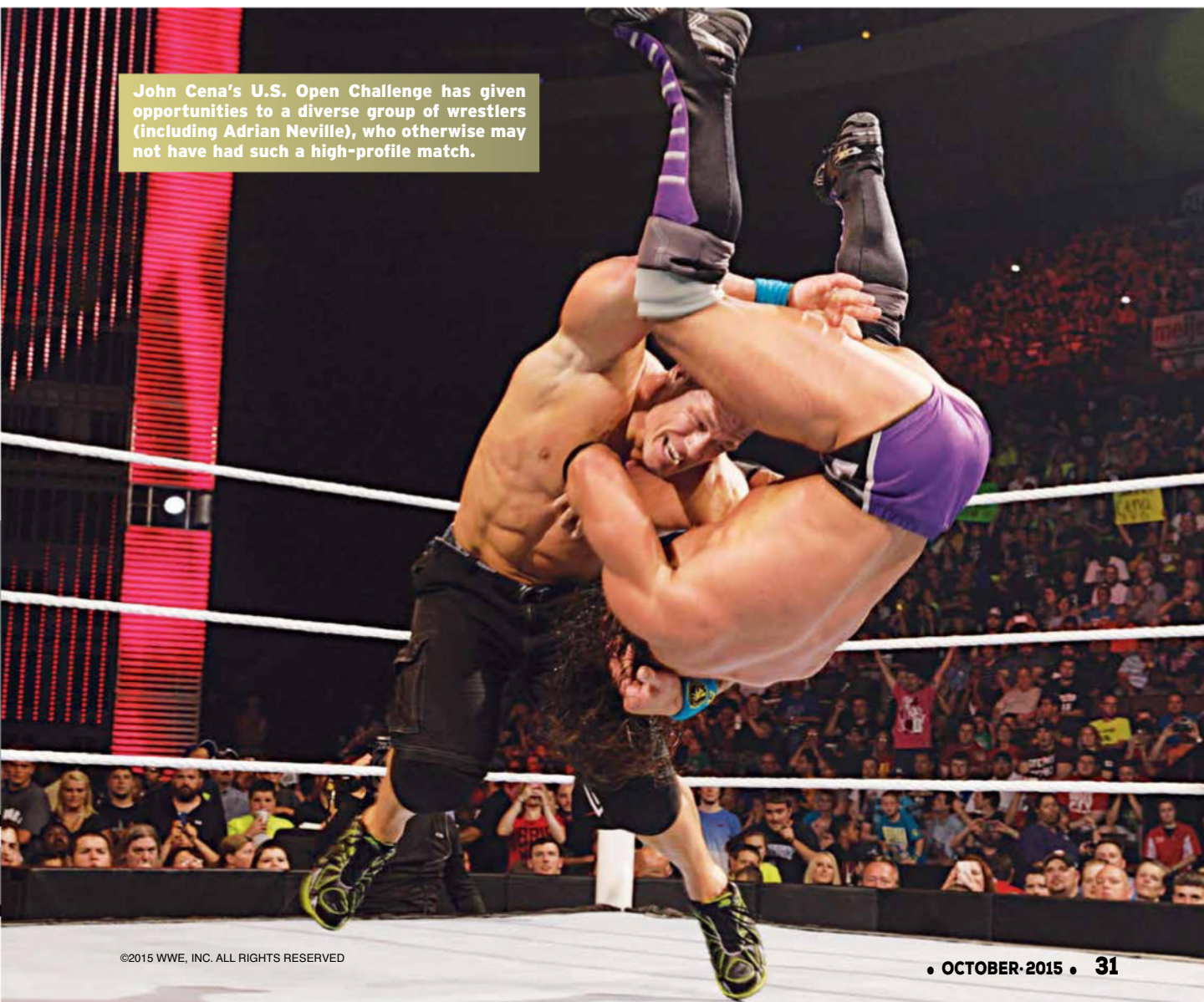
FANS MIGHT HAVE filed out of Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California, with sick feelings in their stomachs following Seth Rollins' less-than-satisfying WWE World heavy-weight title victory over Roman Reigns and defending champ Brock Lesnar in the main event of WrestleMania 31, but they had two great championship memories to make the night worthwhile: Daniel Bryan winning the Intercontinental title in a seven-way ladder match and John Cena forcing Rusev to surrender the United States belt via tapout.

A casual analysis would indicate that WWE wanted to give fans two feel-good moments to counteract the potential letdown of the World title match. No scenario seemed popular: Lesnar was a hated absentee champion for the past several months, and fans resented Reigns leapfrogging Bryan to secure the World title shot. And the actual result, Rollins winning the title, was redeemed only by its unexpectedness.

Then there was a deeper, more hopeful, theory: that WWE was placing renewed emphasis on the I-C and U.S. championships. Bryan and Cena are arguably the two most popular and most talented wrestlers in the company. Bryan, who had been denied the main event, would inspire a "Yes" moment with his Intercontinental title victory. Cena, who has nothing to prove by winning the World title at this stage of his career, would be placed on a separate track away from the main-event mix.

The purpose of the Intercontinental title, established in 1979, has changed from time to time in its 36-year history, first serving as a silver medal of sorts for top-rate wrestlers already eliminated from the WWF World title picture (e.g. Pat Patterson and Pedro Morales). In the "Rock 'n' Wrestling" era, it became the achievable prize for the hottest "gimmick wrestlers" in the federation (e.g. The Honky Tonk Man and The Ultimate Warrior). During the "New

John Cena's U.S. Open Challenge has given opportunities to a diverse group of wrestlers (including Adrian Neville), who otherwise may not have had such a high-profile match.





A potential career-threatening injury to Daniel Bryan forced him to lay down the Intercontinental title belt, which has to be considered a blow to any plan to reestablish the credibility of that championship.

Generation” of the early- to mid-1990s, the strap was used to establish credibility for wrestlers being groomed for the World title (e.g. Bret Hart and Shawn Michaels).

Tremendous damage was done to the Intercontinental title’s prestige during the Monday Night War. Desperate to hot-shot *Raw* as often as possible in its ratings race with *WCW Monday Nitro*, the Intercontinental title bounced like a hot potato, jumping from Val Venis to Road Dogg to Goldust to The Godfather to Jeff Jarrett within the span of three months in 1999. The running joke was the I-C title changed hands about eight times between *PWI*’s deadline and the time the magazine hit the newsstands.

The establishment of WWE’s “World heavyweight championship” in 2002 was almost the death knell for the Intercontinental title. The Big Gold Belt fulfilled the role once reserved for the I-C title as WWE’s second-most prestigious championship, leading to WWE unifying the two titles and abandoning the I-C belt only a month later. Fortunately, WWE reversed course and crowned Christian the new champion—by virtue of a battle royal victory—in May 2003.

The U.S. championship hasn’t fared much better since WWE adopted it as an official title in July 2003. Often depicted as a shade less important than the I-C championship, the U.S. belt was barely more than a TV title for the secondary Smackdown brand for many years. WWE, how-



Pat Patterson was declared the first Intercontinental champion in 1979 (above). The title was temporarily shelved after Triple-H won a match against Kane at 2002's No Mercy that unified the I-C and newly created World titles (below).

ever, has demonstrated surprising commitment to the U.S. title despite its origins as an NWA and WCW championship.

WWE places tremendous importance on its current World title, but often treats its secondary championships as storyline props at best and meaningless trinkets at worst. More prestigious championships would



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THE GREATEST INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONS OF ALL-TIME

To avoid confusion with the Mid-South's North American championship, WWF promoter Vincent J. McMahon decided to scrap his company's version of the North American title in 1979. The WWF announced that current North American champion Pat Patterson had unified his championship with the South American title in a tournament in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Here are our picks for the top 10 greatest champions:

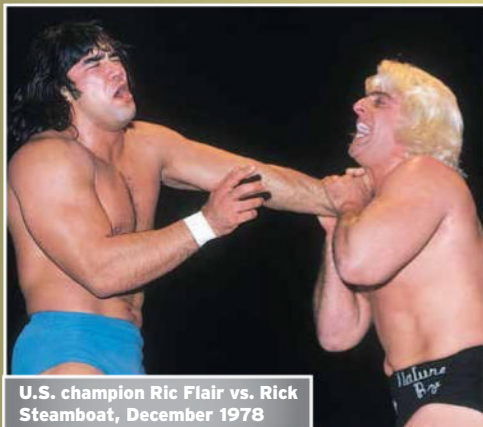


Intercontinental champion Bret Hart vs. Curt Hennig, SummerSlam 1991

1. Bret Hart (*2 reigns; 1991-92*)
Beat Hennig and Michaels en route to WWF title.
.....
2. Randy Savage (*1 reign; 1986-87*)
Made foes, from Steamboat to Steele, look good.
.....
3. Razor Ramon (*4 reigns; 1993-96*)
WM 10 ladder match one of best defenses ever
.....
4. Curt Hennig (*2 reigns; 1990*)
Arguably the greatest WWE wrestler not to win World title.
.....
5. Shawn Michaels (*3 reigns; 1992-95*)
Matches with Hart and Ramon made him a star
.....
6. Tito Santana (*2 reigns; 1984-85*)
Passionate defender of the I-C belt—*Arriba!*
.....
7. Pedro Morales (*2 reigns; 1980-81*)
Most combined days as champ: 619
.....
8. Chris Jericho (*9 reigns; 1999-2009*)
Had some good moments in there somewhere
.....
9. The Honky Tonk Man (*1 reign; 1987-88*)
Longest single reign in history: 454 days
.....
10. Magnificent Muraco (*2 reign; 1981-84*)
Beach bum frustrated Morales and Snuka

THE GREATEST UNITED STATES CHAMPIONS OF ALL-TIME

Although the NWA recognized only one world heavy-weight championship, wrestling's oldest governing body allowed several versions of the U.S. title to exist in various territories over the years. The Mid-Atlantic incarnation was originally intended for Johnny Valentine, who had already held versions of the U.S. title in Detroit, Toronto, and Texas. Harley Race was crowned the first champion on New Year's Day, 1975.



U.S. champion Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat, December 1978

1. Ric Flair (6 reigns; 1977-96)
First five reigns prepared him for World title glory
.....
2. Magnum T.A. (2 reigns; 1985-86)
Belly-to-belly helped T.A. win bouts in record time
.....
3. Blackjack Mulligan (4 reigns; 1976-78)
Won epic seesaw feud with Paul Jones
.....
4. Lex Luger (5 reigns; 1987-98)
Most combined days as champ: 948
.....
5. Greg Valentine (3 reigns; 1980-83)
Mutilated Roddy Piper's ear and broke a few legs
.....
6. Barry Windham (1 reign; 1988-89)
The Four Horsemen were at full gallop
.....
7. Dallas Page (2 reigns; 1997-98)
DDP inspired millions during *Nitro* heyday
.....
8. Dean Ambrose (1 reign; 2013-14)
His 351 days comprise longest reign of WWE era
.....
9. Nikita Koloff (1 reign; 1986-87)
Beat Magnum in best-of-seven series
.....
10. Dean Malenko (1 reign; 1997)
Spring-boarded from U.S. title to top of "PW500"

create more compelling rivalries, or at least that's how the argument goes.

Is WWE finally recognizing that longstanding theory?

"I think it's obvious that WWE intends for the I-C and U.S. titles to regain their luster," said Jim Ross, WWE's former vice president of talent relations and legendary voice of *Raw*. "This was underscored by the simple fact that Cena and Bryan were the chosen ones to rejuvenate their respective titles. It seems that WWE is implementing a long-term project to make the two titles mean more, as all titles are only as good as the men or women who hold them."

And the U.S. championship—not the Intercontinental title—has been the great beneficiary since *WrestleMania*. Cena made his "U.S. Open Challenge" a staple of *Raw* and *Smackdown*, accepting surprise challenges on a weekly basis. And he has embraced this with typical "Never Give Up" gusto, demonstrating even more enthusiasm for his role as U.S. champion in 2015 than he did during his three standout U.S. title reigns in 2004-05.

Bryan, the new Intercontinental champion, enjoyed an impressive win over Dolph Ziggler on *Raw* and absorbed a pummeling from Sheamus on *Smackdown* before WWE pulled him off the road due to medical reasons—only two weeks after his victory at *WrestleMania*. With his health and career in doubt, Bryan vacated the championship on the May 11 edition of *Raw*.

Triple-H and Stephanie McMahon gleefully accepted

the forfeiture and scheduled a six-way match for the vacant title inside the dreaded Elimination Chamber that would be won by Ryback. The decision to hold the match inside the Chamber, and not have a quickie battle royal on *Raw*, affirmed the theory that WWE was committed to making the championship special again.

Another criticism is that one championship is not distinguished from the other in terms of what they represent. Cena's U.S. title defenses during a U.K. tour this spring indicated there is no geographical limitation. There is much talk about the heritage of each title, but no attempt is made to explain that heritage other than Michael Cole hurriedly mentioning "Shawn Michaels, Bret Hart, and Edge were Intercontinental champions who became WWE Hall of Famers" or "greats such as Harley Race, Ric Flair, and Eddie Guerrero held the United States championship."

Titles have become harder to define since the territorial days. The Mid-Atlantic, Central States, and Pacific Northwest championships—and titles representing the states of Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, and Texas, among others—reflected the geographical confines of each promotion. Even those regional championships that were exaggerated to project national reach—including the United States title in the Mid-Atlantic, the National title in Georgia, the American title in Texas, and the North American title in the Mid-South—were among the top titles in the industry, with those champions representing

Jim Ross, interviewing U.S. champion Barry Windham in 1988, believes WWE can take advantage of its massive library of footage to reeducate the fans about the importance of the I-C and U.S. titles.

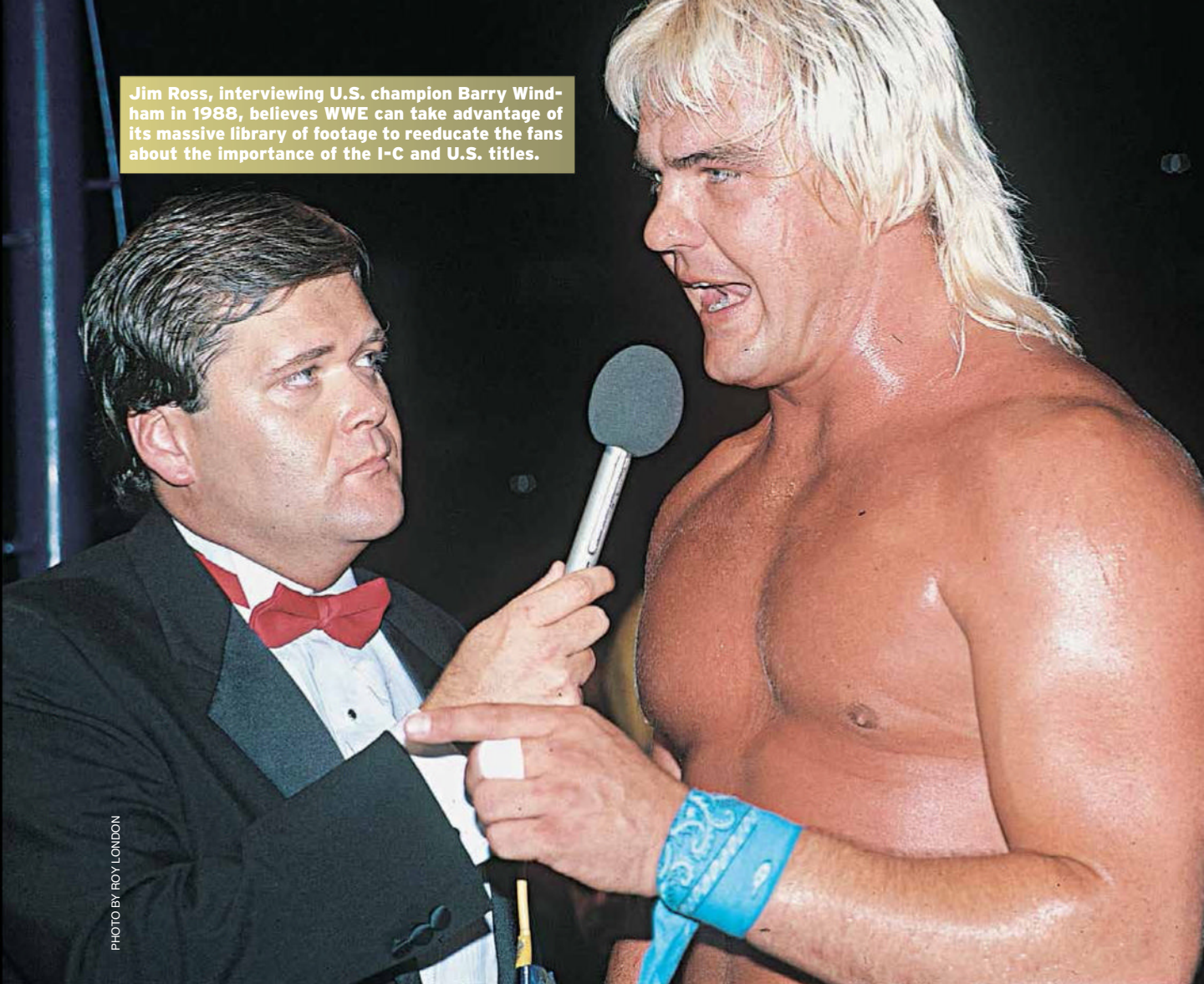


PHOTO BY ROY LONDON

particular territories and often receiving title shots when the NWA or AWA World champions toured the area. Even TV belts had unique parameters, namely the 10- to 20-minute time-limit restrictions for title bouts.

Today, it's still easy to define the WWE World heavyweight title, the WWE World tag team title, and the Divas title. But what do the Intercontinental and U.S. championships actually represent? Nothing in the geographical sense, and their place among heavyweight wrestlers remains undefined. It seems the heritage of these championships, dating back decades, is the key to their prestige.

Ross suggested that programs detailing the histories of these titles should be developed for the WWE Network. "I agree with utilizing the heritage and lineage of the titles to help jumpstart them," he told *PWI*. "TV features on the WWE Network about the history of both titles would help a great deal, including shorter versions of those features on *Raw*. I've suggested these features on my *Ross Report*

podcast. Many young fans were not around when both these titles had great significance, and they need a history lesson."

It could be that Vince McMahon doesn't like to be encumbered by tradition, because WWE doesn't make much money off history, but from an ever-present now. Today's stars matter—not wrestlers from 30 years ago.

Ross disagrees with that criticism. "McMahon is too smart to allow titles that mean nothing to receive valuable TV time over the long haul without doing something about it," he said. "Again, it's the people who hold the titles that make the titles valuable. I don't think the 'encumbered by tradition' theory has any validity in this case."

Although most of the past two decades suggest otherwise, it's undeniable that WWE—perhaps due Triple-H's influence—has demonstrated above-average commitment to the Intercontinental and U.S. championships since *WrestleMania*. The sport will be greatly enhanced if this trend continues. □

RISING to REDEMPTION

Why Drew Galloway's New Faction Is More Than A Three-Man Band

*Some have dismissed
The Rising as merely a
grittier version of 3MB.
But with thousands
of fans supporting
Galloway, Eli Drake,
and Mica, this
group is stronger
than the power
of three*

TEXT BY
HARRY
BURKETT

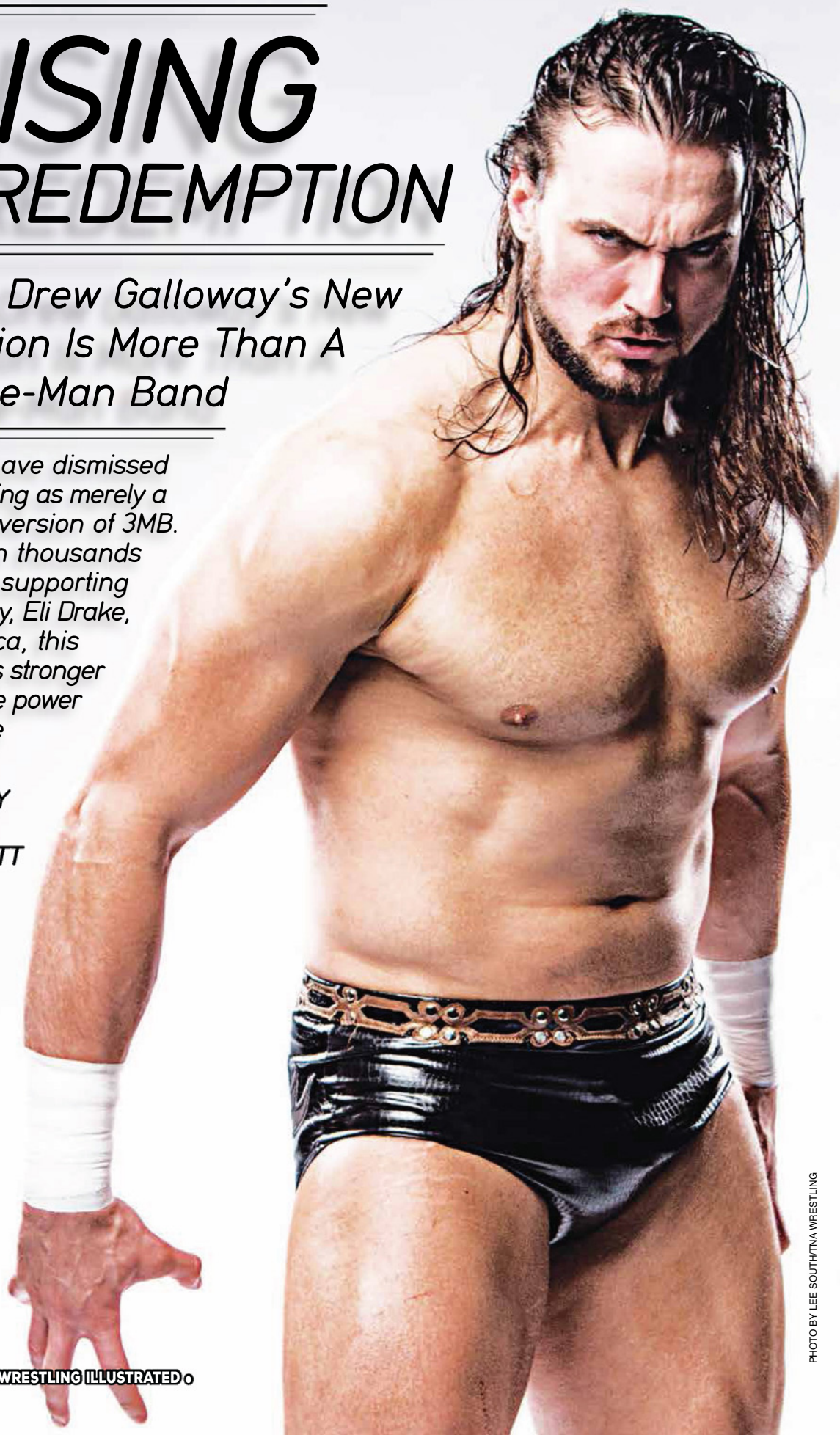


PHOTO BY LEE SOUTHTNA WRESTLING

DREW GALLOWAY QUICKLY uploaded his latest video message on Instagram and contemplated the reporter's question: What makes The Rising—and the movement it purports to represent—unique from all the other factions in wrestling?

"This right here," Galloway said, picking up his iPhone and tapping it with his finger. "Since the beginning of time in wrestling, every popular wrestler has claimed to do what he does for the sake of the fans. 'I'm going to win this title for you, the fans. I'm going to beat this bad guy, and I'm doing it all for you, the fans.' For over a hundred years, wrestlers have heard the chants, the boos, signed autographs, maybe they had the occasional fan club, but it's not until recently that wrestlers have been truly interactive with the fans. And, I can honestly say, I don't think any wrestler has been so proactive about making them a part of the action, making them a part of a movement. The Rising isn't just about Mica, Eli Drake, and me. It's about all the fans rallying to our cause."

Is Galloway driven by purely altruistic motives? Has he taken a sacred vow to eliminate all scoundrels from the mat sport? Is he the second coming of Mr. Wrestling II, a paragon of probity?

"Ha, ha, ha," Galloway gave a hearty laugh, revealing the infectious smile and boyish dimples that have made him a heartthrob around the world. "I'm doing it for completely selfish, self-serving reasons! And, yes, I'm using the interactive gimmick and the fans to advance my career! Listen, I'm being honest here, give me credit for that!"

Galloway's eyes dropped to the floor, but a bemused look remained on his face, as if pondering what he had just said ... maybe he



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

had revealed too much. "Like I said, I'm being completely honest," repeated Galloway in his thick Scottish accent, as if too embarrassed to accept the mantle of wrestling hero. "Am I using social media to generate interest in the careers of Drew Galloway and The Rising? Absolutely. But, most importantly, I want to minimize the influence of The Beat Down Clan in TNA to create a better place for The Rising, and guys like us, to flourish. MVP and his street toughs are using a gang mentality to divide and conquer everyone else in TNA. I say this: We marshal our own forces: me, Mica, Eli Drake, the hundreds of thousands of fans via social media, and anyone else—Kurt Angle, Bobby Roode, Austin Aries, Ken Anderson—who wants to fight this thuggery."

Then the former WWE Intercontinental champion reflected for a moment. "MVP and I have one thing in common: We're both very ambitious men who want successful careers. The difference is that MVP is taking the low road and I'm taking the high road."



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING

Wrestling under the name Drew McIntyre, Galloway was part of what became known as a WWE comedy act with 3MB teammates Jinder Mahal and Heath Slater (top). With Mica and Eli Drake at his side in Team Rising, the stakes are a bit higher for Galloway in TNA (above).



Led by MVP, The Beat Down Clan has been making life miserable for not only Galloway, but everyone on the roster that is not part of the evil faction. Galloway is not pandering to the fan base when he solicits its support to do away with BDC.

Galloway initially confronted the BDC when TNA's European tour stopped for several *Impact Wrestling* television tapings in Scotland. Now a member of the TNA roster, Galloway has become just as popular in North America as he is in the United Kingdom.

His true breakthrough occurred in mid-March. For 72 hours, Galloway was granted full control of TNA's social media—Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.—and used that to launch his #StandUp campaign. One week later, before the BDC could fully respond, Galloway introduced Mica, son of WWE legend Haku, and Eli Drake, a veteran of Full Impact Pro, NXT, and Championship Wrestling From Hollywood, as his new allies.

Unified with Mica and Drake as The Rising, Galloway has parlayed his virtual momentum into tangible in-ring success. The Rising defeated the BDC by disqualification in their first meeting in April, Galloway beat Low-Ki in a Steel Pipe on a Pole match at Hardcore Justice, and Galloway defeated MVP in a one-on-one bout in May. The BDC lost Samoa Joe in the midst of this feud and brought in Homicide, but MVP, Low-Ki, Kenny King, and Homicide are still on the defensive.

Heels usually have the advantage in factional

feuds, which tend to be more violent and less wrestling-based than singles feuds. The Rising vs. the BDC has been an exception.

"That's because Galloway has two genuine badass dudes in his corner," offered Josh Daniels, host of *Impact Wrestling* and a follower of Galloway's career in WWE. "Mica is a stronger, faster, more agile version of his dad, Haku, who was arguably the toughest man in the business. And look at Eli Drake. He's jacked, physically—take a look at those shoulders and those abs—and mentally. He knows this exposure in TNA is his golden opportunity. Galloway has made the fans a crucial force in The Rising. I think Mica and Drake have joined The Rising for the right reasons, but, even if they thought about turning against Galloway, it would be career suicide. This is their first exposure, so they have to win this fight with the BDC."

This is not Galloway's first experience with a wrestling triad. He joined Heath Slater and Jinder Mahal as The Three-Man Band (or 3MB as they became known) in a desperate attempt to salvage his WWE career. While often derided as a comedy act, Galloway, Slater, and Mahal extended their presence on WWE programming for another year-

Back in 2009, Drew McIntyre wore WWE's Intercontinental title belt for 161 days. Vince McMahon boldly declared that the Scot would win a world title. Perhaps that will happen in TNA.



PHOTO BY DUANE LONG

and-a half. Galloway knows how to survive, and finding a way to become more entertaining enabled him to survive in WWE. Today's TNA is a darker environment than WWE, and that makes it the perfect comeback venue for Galloway.

And, this time, Galloway is the undisputed leader. He always seemed ill-suited for a follower's role in 3MB, especially with someone like Slater in

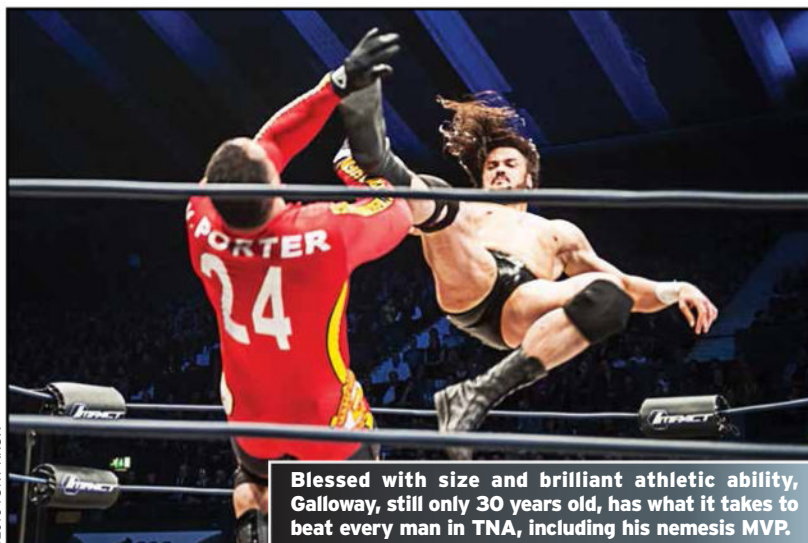
charge. As a member of 3MB, however, and as an up-close observer of The Shield, Galloway realized there are benefits to being in a three-man crew.

"That definitely was not a wasted experience for Drew," added Daniels. "And I don't think fans ever accepted him in that secondary role anyway. He's always been a superstar-in-the-making and fans already accept him as that. In his mind,

though, I think Drew believes he has to repair his image, and, maybe through redeeming TNA by getting rid of the BDC, he can redeem his own reputation."

Galloway was amused by that theory. "I'm open to any psychoanalysis you want to offer," he said. "Once we break up the BDC, and MVP's doing opening matches on *Xplosion*, no one's going to care about my motives. Thanks to the fans, we're cleaning up this place."

With that kind of support, Galloway is more than capable of rising to the occasion. □



Blessed with size and brilliant athletic ability, Galloway, still only 30 years old, has what it takes to beat every man in TNA, including his nemesis MVP.

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HE'S ZIGGING WHILE WWE'S ZAGGING

WILL

DOLPH ZIGGLER

EVER GET HIS
JUST DUE?

Dolph Ziggler's career has had more stops and starts than a New York City subway. Isn't it about time "The Showoff" had a little more than a brief amount of time to actually show off something shiny?

TEXT BY AL CASTLE

IT WAS HARDLY the picture of wrestling achievement: Dolph Ziggler lying on the mat, writhing in pain, having just been forced to kiss his opponent's backside.

And yet, Extreme Rules represented one of the most successful nights so far of 2015 for Ziggler, who beat Sheamus on the show to pick up his first pay-per-view win of the year, despite being brutally attacked and humiliated after his victory.

For WWE's resident "Show Off" and his fans, the victory over the recently repackaged Sheamus offered new promise for a push to the top of the cards. But, after a decade of starts and stops in Ziggler's path to main-event success, nobody could blame fans for not getting their hopes up.

"How many times have we seen WWE get behind Dolph for a few months, just to pull the rug out from under him?" said longtime Ziggler fan Jake Ratner, who was at the Allstate Arena in Rosemont, Illinois, for the April 26 event. "How does the saying go? 'Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.' All I know is that they've made Ziggler look like a fool a lot over the years."

It's not as if Ziggler has had a disappointing WWE career since joining the company in 2005. His resume boasts two world title reigns, as well as stints with the Intercontinental, United States, and tag team championships.

But anyone who has followed Ziggler's career closely would know that those achievements, no matter how impressive, don't tell the whole story of his WWE tenure. His first world title reign lasted just 11 minutes, and came not by a pinfall or submission



PHOTO BY JOHN SMOLEK

win, but by edict of his then-girlfriend/Smackdown General Manager Vickie Guerrero. His second world title win came after he cashed in his Money in the Bank contract on an injured Alberto Del Rio. That reign lasted just over two months, and did not include a single pay-per-view main event.

The truth is, while Ziggler has enjoyed brief visits to WWE's main-event picture, he's spent most of his career entrenched in the mid-card and often losing to

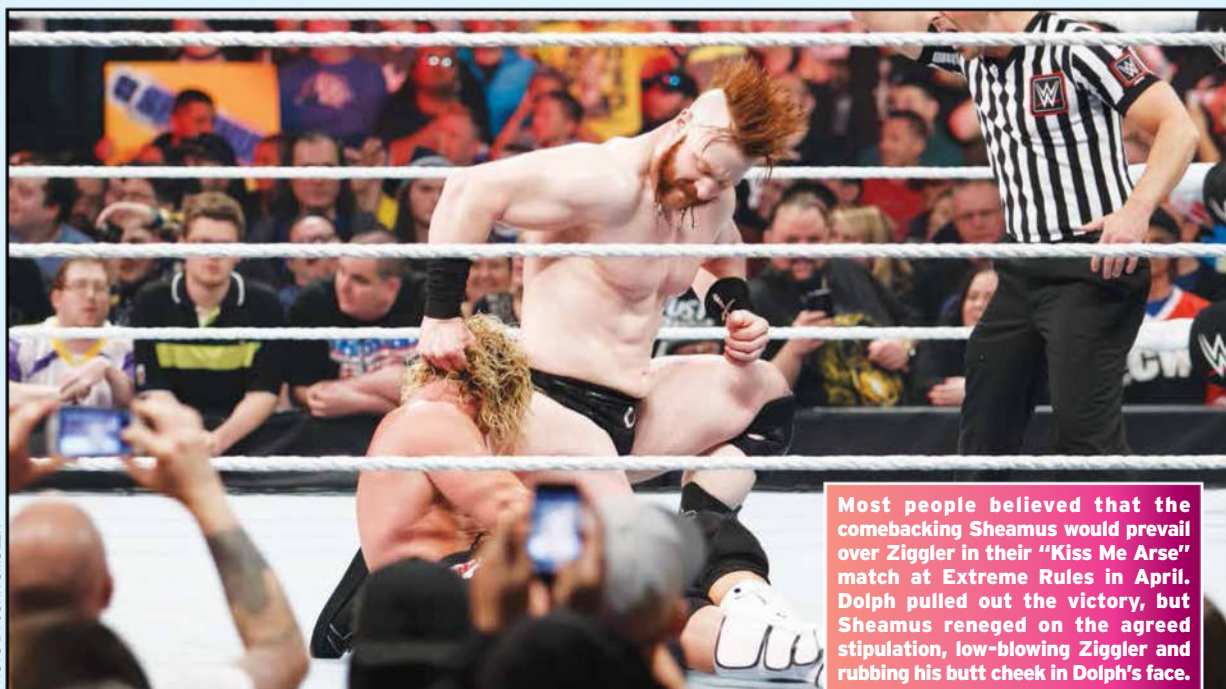


PHOTO BY JOHN SMOLEK

Most people believed that the comebacking Sheamus would prevail over Ziggler in their "Kiss Me Arse" match at Extreme Rules in April. Dolph pulled out the victory, but Sheamus reneged on the agreed stipulation, low-blowing Ziggler and rubbing his butt cheek in Dolph's face.

Ziggler desperately wanted to test his skills against Daniel Bryan at WrestleMania 31 but had to settle for a seven-way ladder match for Bad News Barrett's Intercontinental title.

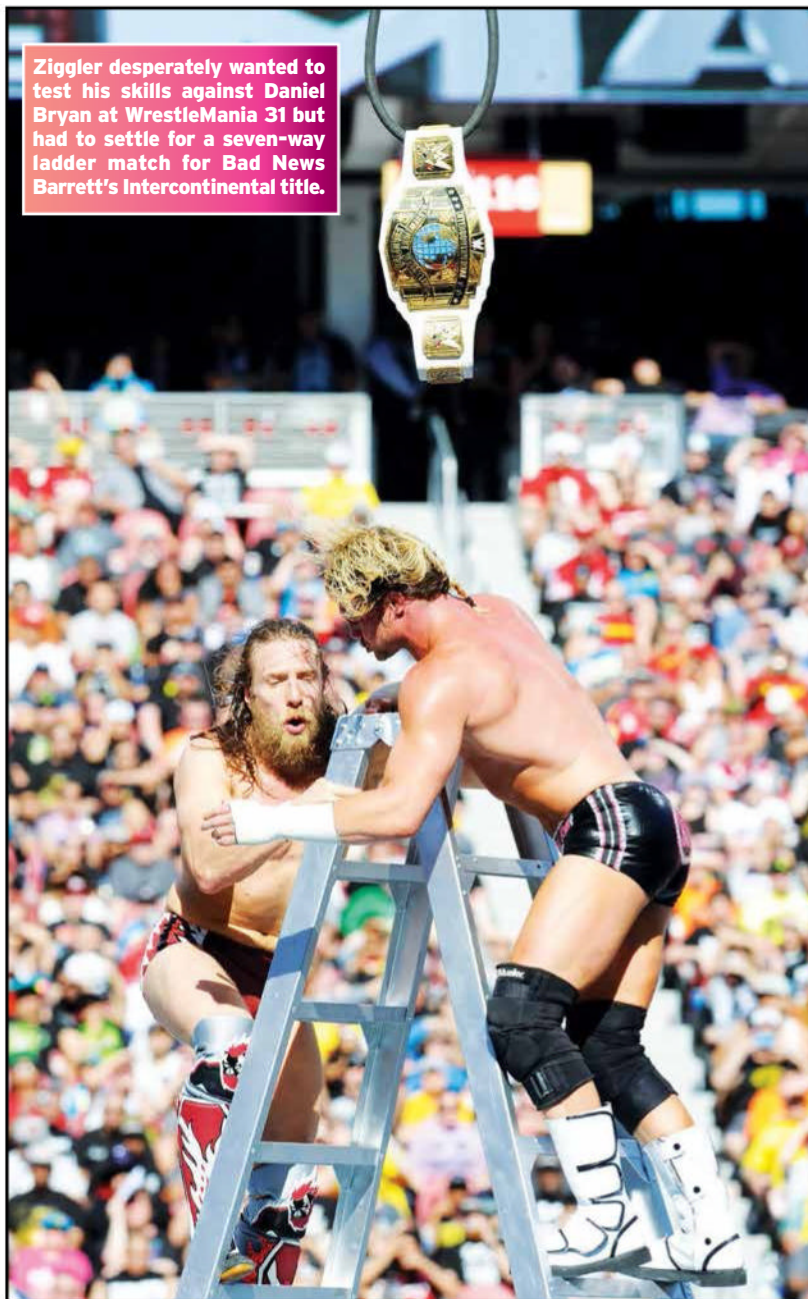


PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

opponents with far less talent than he has. As such, Ziggler has earned a reputation, arguably behind only Daniel Bryan, as the most under-appreciated wrestler on the WWE roster.

"The guy is just so good—one of the very best in the business. But you wouldn't know that from his place in the company," long-time Ziggler ally, and former rival, Zack Ryder said. "In the arenas and on the Internet, fans can't get enough of Dolph. But for some reason, he can't seem to catch a break—at least not one that lasts."

The former Kent State University amateur wrestling standout has earned such loyal fan support by consistently delivering inspired wrestling performances, whether in televised bouts or the

opening matches of non-televvised live events. His offense is athletic and spectacular and includes a picture-perfect dropkick and his Zig-Zag finisher, which, like Randy Orton's more-celebrated RKO, often comes out of nowhere.

But it's on defense that Ziggler has really shined throughout his career—perhaps too brightly for his own good. His exaggerated tumbles when struck by opponents are often compared to those of WWE Hall of Famer Curt Hennig, and have helped Ziggler earn a reputation as the kind of wrestler who makes all his opponents look better.

But Ziggler might be better off trying to make *himself* look better.

"He may be aiming for Ric Flair, but comes off more like Billy Gunn," said one WWE locker room veteran, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "Nobody makes it to the top of this business by making his opponents look like a million bucks. He's got to get more aggressive in there. Stop worrying about how much height you can get on a dropkick, and start really laying in those punches."

If there's one area where Ziggler doesn't pull punches, it's in sharing his thoughts about WWE politics. Whether it's on social media, or mainstream interviews, Ziggler is unabashedly honest about his career frustrations, and is not above rallying his loyal fans behind his cause. That was the

case when he used Twitter to unsuccessfully lobby for a singles match with Bryan at WrestleMania 31.

"Everything I've ever done has basically been an uphill battle, but I wouldn't have it any other way," Ziggler told Halifax, Nova Scotia's *Chronicle Herald* in April. "That's why there's a chip on my shoulder. That's why I prove myself to be the best every single night."

While Ziggler's subversive attitude has helped him win over legions of fans, it may have also earned him a reputation among WWE management as insubordinate. "I get in trouble a lot," Ziggler admitted in a 2013 interview with CBS Northeast Ohio affiliate WOIO-TV.

Still, not even Vince McMahon himself can deny the glimpses of true star power that Ziggler has displayed in his most inspired performances.



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Never was that more apparent than in the high-stakes main event of last year's Survivor Series. Ziggler overcame seemingly insurmountable three-on-one odds to become his team's sole survivor, and, at least temporarily, vanquish The Authority from power.

It was heralded as Ziggler's latest star-making performance. But like so many times before, Ziggler's ensuing push was short-lived. Two months later, he lasted less than three minutes in The Royal Rumble before being effortlessly disposed of by

Kane and The Big Show.

But with Cena having settled into the role of gatekeeper to the top tier, Roman Reigns stalling in his big push, Daniel Bryan perennially nursing an injury, and Orton being far too familiar in the World title picture, it's at least possible that WWE could look to Ziggler to help flesh out its crop of main-event fan favorites.

At the age of 35, and with a decade of experience in the company, a long overdue opportunity for Ziggler to "show the world" what he can do couldn't come soon enough. □

Ziggler won the 2014 Slammy as Social Media Champion (top), which is fine, but it doesn't compare to the feeling of winning the World title (bottom). Ziggler cashed in his Money in the Bank contract to beat Alberto Del Rio for the title in April 2013. His reign lasted a little more than two months.



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TOMORROW'S COVERS TODAY

PWI EXAMINES THE NEXT WAVE OF WRESTLING SUPERSTARS

FOR ALL THE unexpected success of the traveling NXT road show, WWE isn't fooling itself into believing that the immediate bottom line of its developmental program will appear in black ink. The goal of WWE's Orlando-based state-of-the-art Performance Center is to create a pipeline for talent that will keep the company at the forefront of this business for many years to come.

On that basis, so far, so good.

The talent flow from NXT to the main WWE roster is happening faster than even company executives could have dreamed possible. On top of that, there is a wealth of men and women perfecting their craft in Orlando that most fans aren't even aware of at this point. But there are also wrestlers in Ring of Honor, TNA, and the companies this magazine refers to as "indies" that have the talent to make it big in this sport.

All they need is their big break.

In this special section, we take a look at 15 such stars, providing brief bios, examining their primary attributes and deficiencies, and concluding matters with a *PWI* "scouting report," assessing their chances for long-term success. Some names are fairly well known to the public, some not so much. All are under the age of 30, so they still have plenty of time to pursue their dreams.

In addition to the analyses by Dan Murphy, Kevin McElvaney, and our Japan stringer, STRIGGA, Art Director Edd Wright worked overtime in creating special covers for each of these stars-in-the-making. We're sure seeing themselves portrayed in this manner will inspire these hard-working men and women. It won't be long before some or all of them get an actual cover treatment.

NXT

10 (2014)

CHARLOTTE

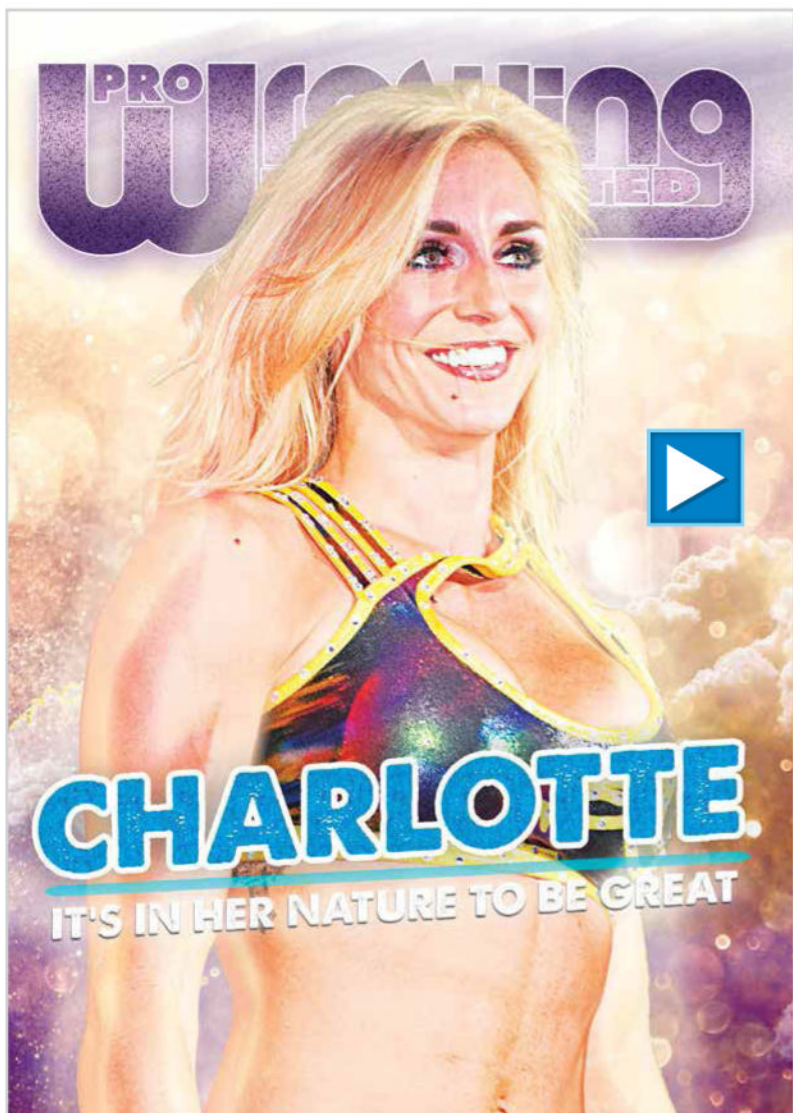
The "Nature Boy's" daughter has been quick to brag about being "genetically superior" to other female wrestlers. Lest one think she was merely boasting, Charlotte became the focal point of NXT's women's division within months of her TV debut. She's an athlete through and through, not opposed to taking to the air but clearly most comfortable close to the mat. Her figure-four leglock is among the most effective holds on the NXT roster. She has a size advantage over most Divas, which helps. Her famous lineage doesn't hurt, either.

She can be arrogant and tends to underestimate her opponents (sound familiar?). She struggled, at times, to retain the NXT Women's title against Bayley, who was arguably an inferior challenger. When she finally lost the belt to Sasha Banks back in February, she seemed to be the most surprised person in the room.

Charlotte is a naturally gifted athlete and performer. She played collegiate volleyball and has previously worked as a personal trainer. Although she's still relatively new to pro wrestling, she's already made quite a name for herself. Granted, an occasional appearance from her dad has surely helped her along. After a brief partnership with Bayley, she rose to prominence as a member of the BFFs (Beautiful Fierce Females) faction with Banks and Summer Rae. Not long after, she became the standout member of the group. Much to the chagrin of the group's other members, Charlotte's ascent continued. Last spring, she entered an eight-woman tournament for the vacant NXT Women's title. After besting Emma and Alexa Bliss in the first two rounds, she defeated Natalya in the finals. She

was crowned champion as her father looked on proudly at ringside. Charlotte wore the belt for the next 258 days, taking on whatever competition came her way. She was voted 2014 *PWI* Rookie of the Year, only the second woman to receive that honor.

What Charlotte lacks in experience, she more than makes up for with strength, agility, and conditioning. She's also proven to be both adaptable and driven, faring well against opponents of all sizes and styles. Sure, she can be overly confident. For that matter, so was her father. She needs to remember that she isn't quite there yet.



BRAM

HEIGHT: 6'3"
WEIGHT: 214
AGE: 28

TOP PWI 500 RANKING:

143 (2014)

PRIMARY PROMOTION:

TNA

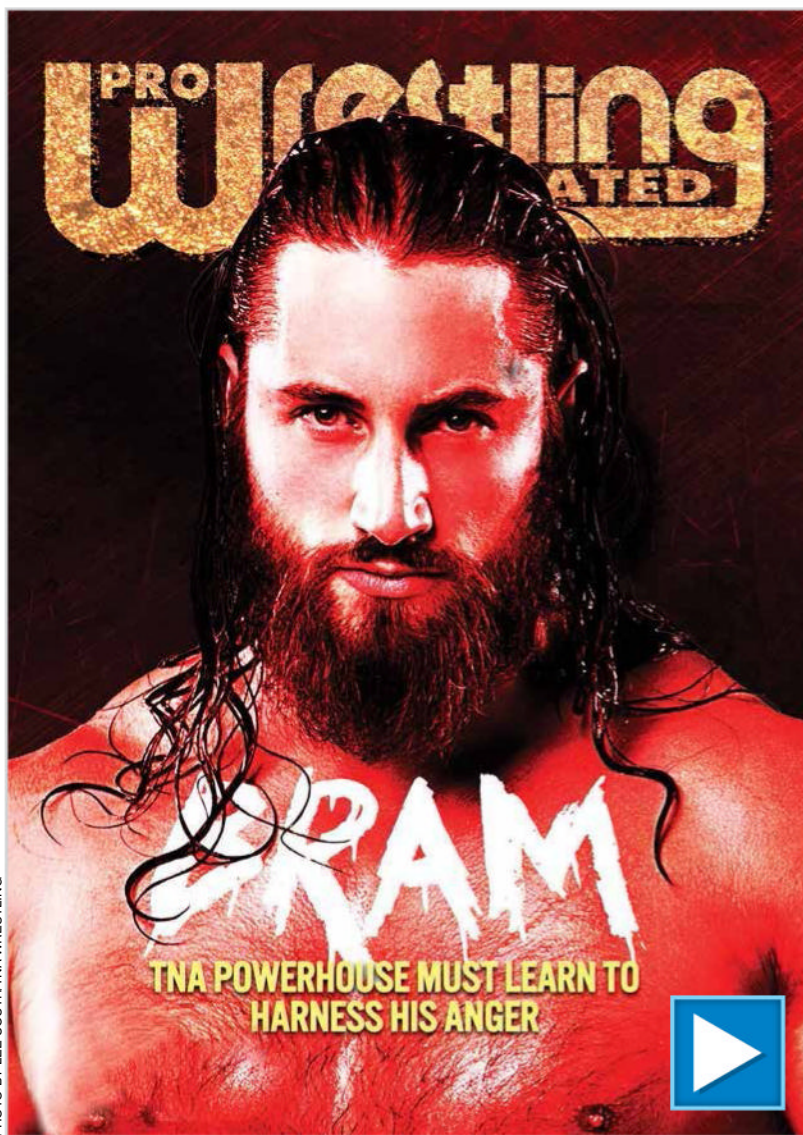


PHOTO BY LEE SOUTHWEST/WRESTLING

an opponent can withstand his blistering brawling offense for the first few minutes, Bram becomes more prone to making mental errors.

BIO

Bram came up in the carnival wrestling circuit in England, training under Jeff Kaye and making his pro debut in 2002. He competed in England's All Star Wrestling before relocating to the United States and signing a developmental contract with WWE in 2010. He was assigned to Florida Championship Wrestling, where he adopted the ring name Kenneth Cameron. He joined a stable called The Ascension in FCW and regularly teamed with Konnor. He was released by WWE in 2012 and landed in TNA in 2014 as a childhood friend of Magnus. Magnus and Bram made for a tumultuous tag team and eventually went on to feud with one another. Bram declared himself the new "King Of Hardcore" and has battled Tommy Dreamer and Abyss in wild brawls.

PWI SCOUTING REPORT

No wrestler wants to make an enemy of someone like Bram. He's tenacious and he's ruthless. He attacks with intent to injure, even if it costs him a match by disqualification.

He frequently interferes in matches and sneak-attacks opponents. Bram's wildly unpredictable and dangerous. However, other than his savage brawling and his lifting DDT, he's a fairly limited wrestler. He rarely uses the catch-as-catch-can skills he learned in England. He has very limited counter-wrestling abilities and untested stamina. Like a boxer always swinging haymakers for an early knockout, Bram is susceptible to a "rope-a-dope" defense that wears him down and saps his energy. Generally speaking, he's too hot-headed and impetuous to be a viable title contender—unless TNA decides to establish some sort of hardcore championship. He could be a terrific tag team wrestler if he developed the necessary social skills to maintain a partnership. Still, Bram can overpower most opponents, and men with lesser technical skills have made a living on that ability alone.

ATTRIBUTES

Bram is a throwback to the days when pro wrestlers simply wanted to get in the ring and beat someone up. A superior brawler with a sadistic streak, Bram is aggressive, focused, and ill-tempered. Simply put, he is an attack dog who is less motivated by title belts than he is by proving his own dominance.

DEFICIENCIES

Bram's greatest strength is also his biggest weakness. He's a hot-tempered pit fighter. He doesn't understand strategy or pacing. He loses his temper at the drop of a hat. He is unable to form alliances. And, the longer a match goes, the less effective he is. If

PRIMARY PROMOTIONS:

NXT,
DRAGON GATE USA,
EVOLVE

TOP PWI 500 RANKING:

155 (2012)

HEIGHT: 6'1"

WEIGHT: 260

AGE: 27

SESUGH UHAA

ATTRIBUTES

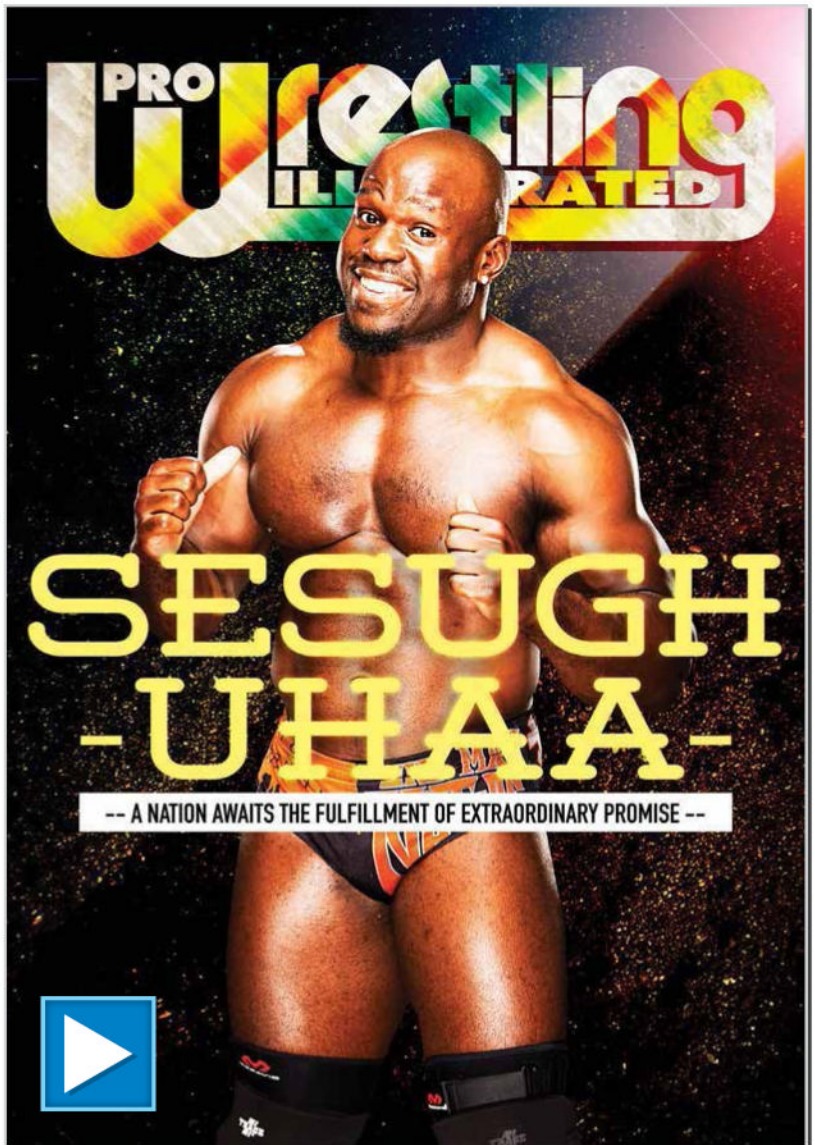
Known in the indies as Uhah Nation, Sesugh is one of WWE's most recent, high-profile signings. He has garnered attention through his almost unreal mix of strength and agility. It takes a rare man to be equally comfortable landing triple-power bombs and standing shooting star presses, but he is up to the task. Regardless of an opponent's style, he'll have a tough time competing with Uhah.

DEFICIENCIES

He'll be the first to tell you his verbal skills aren't quite on par with what he can do in the ring. In today's wrestling landscape, he'll need to work on this. Apart from that, Uhah is under immense pressure to succeed. His reputation precedes him, and he'll want to take pains not to let it weigh him down.

BIO

Originally trained by Mr. Hughes, a young "One Man Nation" knew he wanted to be a wrestler. He hatched a plan to finish college, get a good job, and fund his training. His background in multiple sports helped to develop his speed and strength, which paid off for him in big ways. From his earliest independent bookings in Georgia and Texas, all the way through his celebrated stints in EVOLVE and Dragon Gate (both USA and Japan), Uhah commanded attention. His momentum, impressive though it was, would likely have been even greater if not for a serious knee injury suffered in 2012. When he returned to action the next year, he and BxB Hulk beat Don Fujii and Masaaki Mochizuki for Dragon Gate Japan's Open the Twin Gate championship. Uhah received a tryout with WWE in late-2014 and finished his final independent bookings this spring. In April, he



was officially announced as a new signee in WWE's developmental system.

PWI SCOUTING REPORT

Uhah was so popular and well-regarded by independent wrestling fans, it seemed only a matter of time before a larger promotion would come calling. Now that this has happened, his biggest challenge may be finding an appropriate role in his new environment. He is good at so many things that he'll have to pick and choose what he wants to showcase and when. Not a bad problem to have, to be sure. With the right presentation and a reasonable amount of time to develop his verbal skills, Uhah will have the proverbial brass ring easily within his grasp.

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ADAM COLE

HEIGHT: 5'11"
WEIGHT: 205
AGE: 25

TOP PWI 500 RANKING:

9 (2014)

PRIMARY PROMOTIONS:

**RING OF HONOR,
PRO WRESTLING
GUERRILLA**

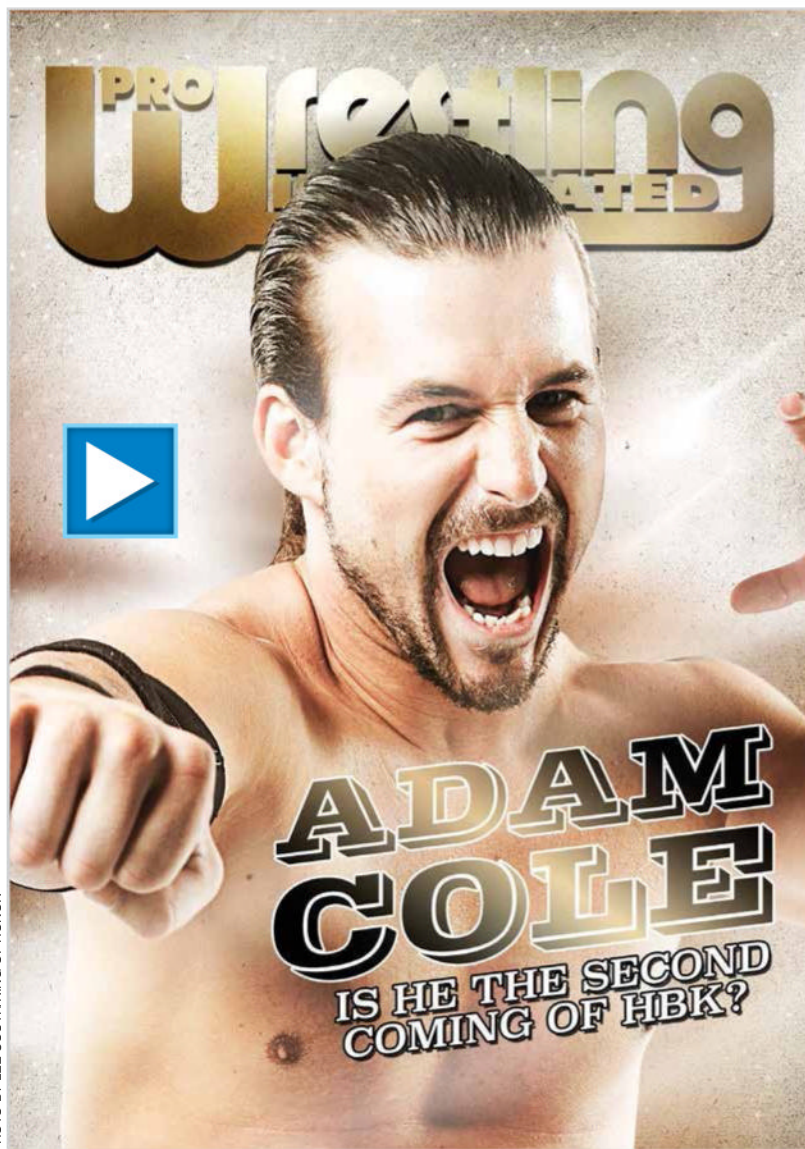


PHOTO BY LEE SOUTHRING OF HONOR

ATTRIBUTES

Cole is of the hottest young prospects in wrestling today. At age 25, he is already a seven-year veteran of the ring. Comparisons to his boyhood idol Shawn Michaels are easy to understand. He's plenty quick and agile, but he prefers to catch opponents off-guard with various kicks and slams. He has an abundance of stamina and ring awareness, which bodes well for him long-term.

DEFICIENCIES

His size. Being under 6-feet with a lean physique needn't limit the path a competitor can take. In the mainstream wrestling landscape, though, the relatively

undersized Cole might face more skepticism than larger athletes will as he fights to prove himself. He also has been recovering from a serious shoulder injury, so his health going forward might be a concern.

BIO

Originally from Manheim, Pennsylvania, Cole was hipped to wrestling by his karate teacher, who introduced him to Attitude Era WWF. He began to train with Combat Zone Wrestling's DJ Hyde during his senior year of high school, traveling 85 miles to Philadelphia on the weekends. In CZW, Cole had an extensive rivalry with Sami Callihan (Solomon Crowe), whom he defeated in the finals of the Best of the Best X tournament. He's fared equally well in other independent organizations, particularly Pro Wrestling Guerrilla. He won PWG's heavyweight title in 2012 and held on to it for nearly two years, a record-setting reign for the promotion that still stands. His greatest acclaim has come from his time with Ring of Honor. Among other feats, he's held both of the company's singles titles, capturing the TV title in 2012 and the ROH heavyweight championship in 2013. During his time as heavyweight champ, he established himself as a major name

with wins over Kevin Steen (Owens), Jay Briscoe, and Jushin Liger. More recently, he won the 2014 edition of the Survival of the Fittest tournament.

PWI SCOUTING REPORT

Cole's high "PWI 500" ranking last year has turned more than a few heads. But the man has an abundance of talent and an understanding of the finer points of the game. Cole has just returned from the torn labrum he suffered late last year. The time off has given him perspective, but he might want to slow down a bit going forward. If he makes the right choices and paces himself, his best years are to come.

NXT

NONE

SASHA BANKS

ATTRIBUTES

The Boston native is far scrappier and tougher than her signature bling and shutter shades might suggest. She's likely the best striker of all the NXT Divas, particularly good at using her knees to wear down opponents. Her Banks Statement (modified bridging crossface) submission hold is more effective than even Charlotte's figure-four. She's seemingly aware of her placement in the ring at all times and is often able use this to her advantage, whether it's using the turnbuckles to aid her offense or keeping opponents away from a rope break.

DEFICIENCIES

She's outsized by a large number of opponents, and that can be a problem. Bigger issue: She has a hard time keeping friends. Treating former partners badly has come back to bite her more than once. She might be tempted to think she can do things alone, but that's a foolish road to take in the wrestling business.

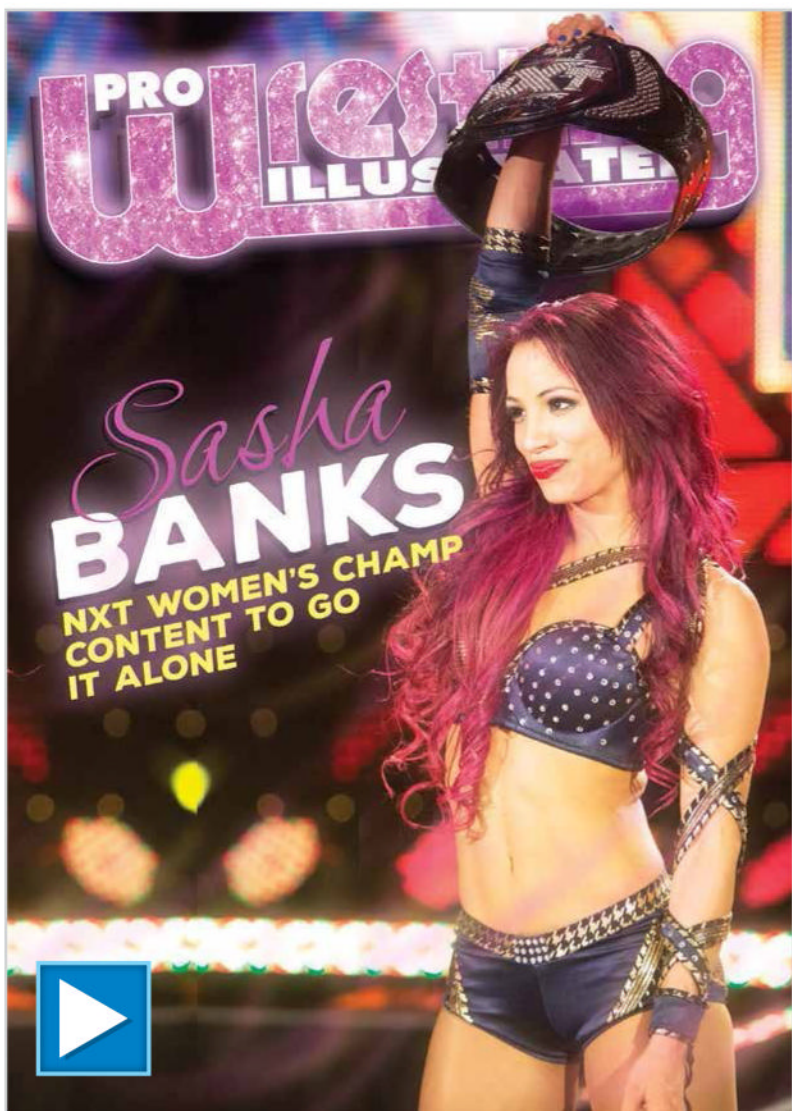
BIO

"The Boss" made her debut at age 18, first competing under the name Mercedes KV. Her first match was for New England's Chaotic Wrestling, where she would spend most of her pre-WWE career. In 2011, she captured the promotion's Women's championship by defeating Alexxis Nevaeh. Banks would go on to hold the title for 260 days, racking up an impressive series of successful defenses. She vacated the title when she was signed by WWE in the summer of 2012. Later that year, she made her TV debut for the NXT brand. She feuded with Audrey Marie, Summer Rae, and Paige. Not long after, Banks and Rae would form the Beautiful Fierce Females faction, which would later expand to include Charlotte. When Charlotte won the NXT Women's title, the group fell apart. Banks formed a short-lived alliance with Becky

Lynch, as she worked to earn a shot at the championship. After multiple unsuccessful title attempts, she finally pinned Charlotte in a fatal four-way at February's NXT Takeover: Rival, beginning her reign as champ.

PWI SCOUTING REPORT

Since she's often physically overmatched, "The Boss" has had to develop an arsenal of moves that work on opponents of all sizes. Through a mix of strikes and submission work, she's able to neutralize bigger opponents and shut down those closer to her own size. Given her relatively diminutive stature, she'd do well to add another aerial move or two to her game. She also needs to remember to keep her friends close, lest they become enemies.



KYLE O'REILLY

HEIGHT: 5'11"
WEIGHT: 207
AGE: 28

TOP PWI 500 RANKING:

61 (2014)

PRIMARY PROMOTIONS:

RING OF HONOR,
PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA,
NEW JAPAN PRO WRESTLING

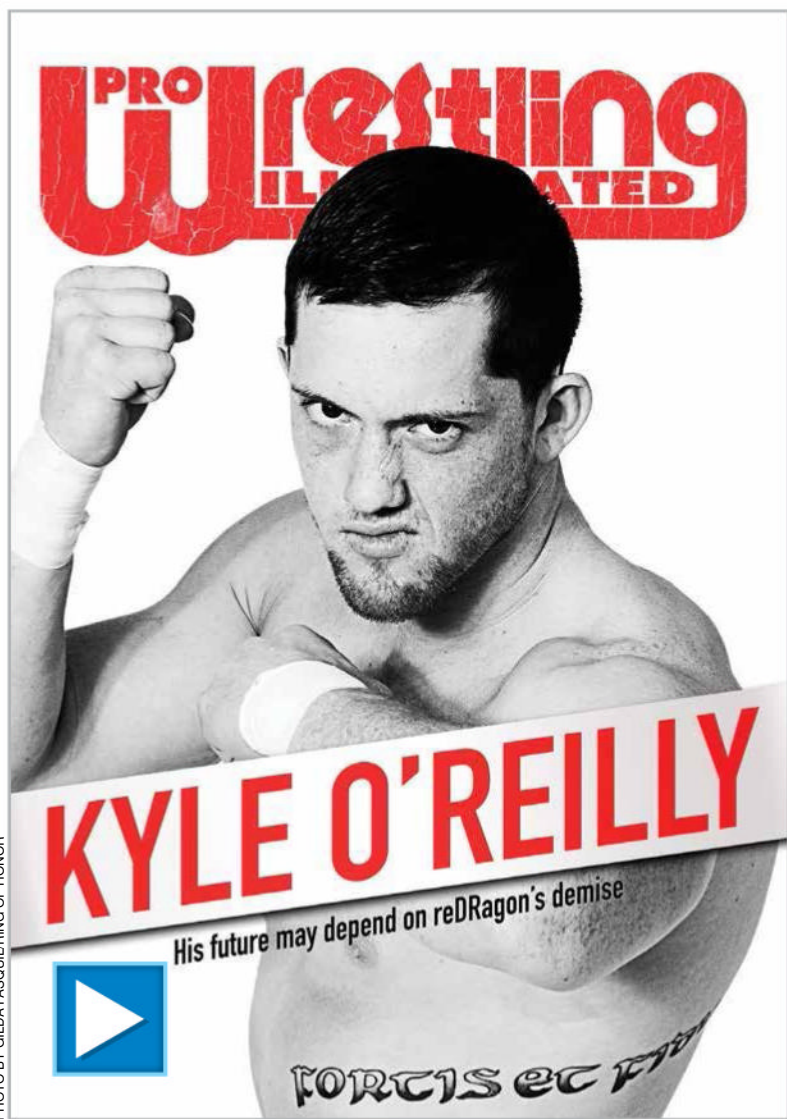


PHOTO BY GILDA PASQUIL/RING OF HONOR

for more singles matches lately, but he's been struggling a bit, particularly against veteran wrestlers like Samoa Joe and Chris Sabin.

BIO

O'Reilly debuted on his native Canada's independent scene in 2005. He captured the NWA Canadian junior heavyweight title three times in 2007. As a singles competitor, he's had arguably the most success in Pro Wrestling Guerrilla. He won the promotion's 2013 Battle of Los Angeles, besting Trent, ACH, and Drake Younger before defeating Michael Elgin in the finals. He captured the PWG heavyweight title in 2014, beating his former tag partner Adam Cole in a "Knockout Or Submission Only" bout. He's best known, though, as one-half of the team reDRagon. The pairing has been wowing fans and besting all comers for several years now. They won the ROH tag title an impressive three times between 2013 and 2014, wearing the belts for 322 days in that most recent instance. In November 2014, reDRagon came out on top in ROH's Tag Wars tournament. That same month, they defeated The Young Bucks in the finals of New Japan's Super Junior tag tournament. Most recently, they had a run with

the IWGP junior heavyweight tag title.

ATTRIBUTES

O'Reilly is an accomplished athlete who is seemingly comfortable competing against any style of opponent. He's a great striker and submission specialist, able to keep high-flying foes grounded and brawlers neutralized. O'Reilly has wrestled around the globe and, despite his age, already has a decade of ring experience under his belt. With Bobby Fish, he's part of reDRagon, one of the most successful tag teams to compete in recent years.

DEFICIENCIES

Several of his best years devoted to becoming a great tag team wrestler mean he's had less time to develop as a singles competitor. He's been booked

PWI SCOUTING REPORT

O'Reilly may soon find himself at a crossroads. Since he is 10 years his partner's junior, he should be thinking long term. He and Fish have gone perhaps as far as they will as a team. It's probably wise, then, for O'Reilly to continue to take singles bookings. He may not begin to rack up wins immediately, but every match helps him to regain his footing as a solo wrestler. He has most of the tools necessary to be a major singles star, given the right opportunity. With some persistence and proper preparation, he could soon find the kind of acclaim he and Fish have achieved as a tag team.

ATTRIBUTES

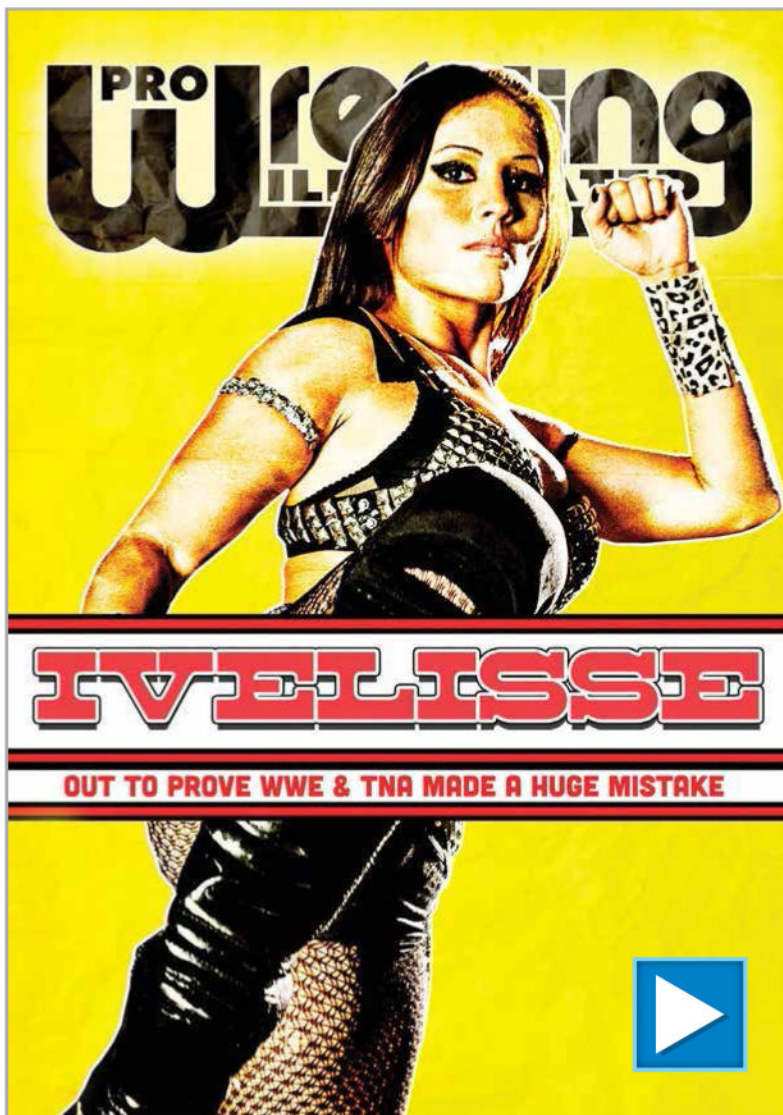
Ivelisse is a spitfire with a chip on her shoulder. After being released from a WWE developmental contract in 2012, she set out to become one of the top names on the independent circuit, and she has achieved that goal. Ivelisse is willing to face both male and female competitors and never backs down from a challenge. She is a gutsy, courageous competitor with an unsurpassed will to win.

DEFICIENCIES

Though she frequently competes against male opponents in Lucha Underground, Ivelisse often relies on the same game plan, instead of adjusting her strategy accordingly. For example, she will frequently attempt to trade strikes against larger male opponents, rather than employ a stick-and-move, evasive game plan. She is so intent on proving that she can compete against all comers that she allows herself to wrestle to an opponent's strengths, rather than to her own.

BIO

Ivelisse was a contestant on *Tough Enough* in 2011. She did not win the contest, but was still signed to a WWE developmental contract and competed as Sofia Cortez. Though she scored notable wins over both Paige and Natalya, she was released. She joined SHINE as a member of the Valkyrie stable in 2012. She auditioned for TNA through the "Gut Check Challenge" in 2013 but did not get signed. In January 2014, she defeated Rain to win the SHINE title. She had a marvelous year, collecting wins over Jazz, Mercedes Martinez, and Leva Bates, and completed a tour of Mexico's AAA promotion, which led to a spot in Lucha Underground. She held the Lucha Underground trios men's title with Son of Havoc and Angelico.



PWI SCOUTING REPORT

It's hard to understand why both WWE and TNA passed on Ivelisse. She had the look, the charisma, and the intensity to succeed in either the Divas or Knockouts divisions. As it turned out, the fact that both WWE and TNA let her go has been a blessing in disguise. She became hungrier. Her intensity increased. She toured Mexico and added more lucha-inspired moves to her arsenal. Ivelisse's work in SHINE and Lucha Underground has silenced any remaining critics. There is a good chance she could still end up in either WWE or TNA. Or she might be more content blazing new trails on her own. She is easily one of the best talents on the indy and international scenes. She doesn't need WWE or TNA to be an elite talent.

ACH

HEIGHT: 5'9"
WEIGHT: 190
AGE: 27

TOP PWI 500 RANKING:

113 (2013)

PRIMARY PROMOTIONS:

RING OF HONOR,
ALL AMERICAN WRESTLING,
ANARCHY CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING

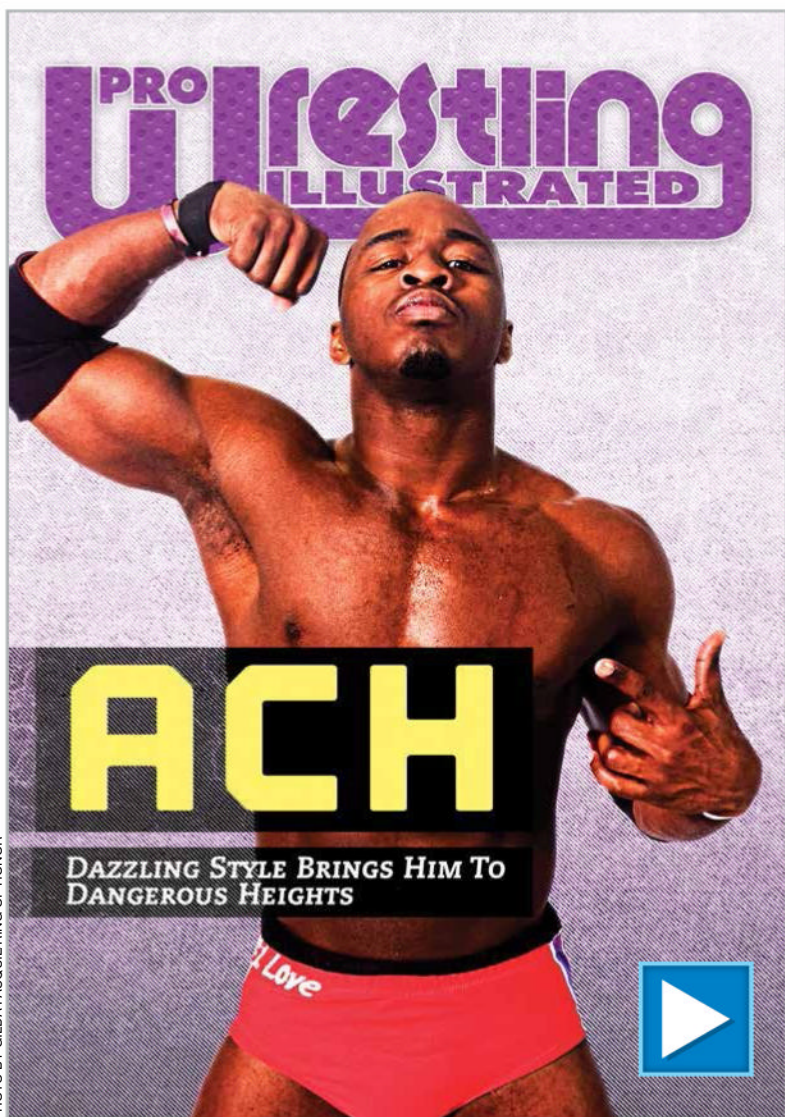


PHOTO BY GILDA PASQUIL/RING OF HONOR

flips and cartwheels, seemingly just for decoration. His flashy style is likely taking a toll on his body and leaving openings for opponents.

BIO

Indy journeyman has been gradually making a name for himself since his debut in 2007. His first big break came with Anarchy Championship Wrestling, the promotion where he won his first heavyweight title in fall 2011. (He'd go on to hold it until the following July.) In September 2012, he began making appearances for ROH. Although he didn't gain many wins initially, he was good enough to secure a contract with the company. Formed Adrenaline Rush with Tadarius Thomas in 2013. The two were top contenders for the ROH tag title in early-2014. Over the years, ACH has won acclaim in other promotions. He captured the AAW Heritage title in a 2013 tournament, then held on to it for the better part of the year. He was also the runner-up in CHIKARA's 2012 Young Lions Cup tournament. He continues to compete with independent

promotions across the U.S. while working his way up the ranks in ROH.

PWI SCOUTING REPORT

ACH is a promising and exciting talent. He knows his limitations and plays to his strengths. At the same time, he has been wrestling a very high impact style for a number of years, and that can't be easy. Sure, his arsenal of moves is always impressive, but they are also dangerous. To put it another way: If he sticks to using cartwheels and flips only to enhance moves that inflict punishment on opponents, he'll likely pick up a few more "W's," and his star will continue to rise.

ATTRIBUTES

This Texan has wrestled across the U.S. and found some degree of success everywhere he's been. He's an excellent aerial competitor, one who consistently surprises both opponents and fans with his innovative offense. He's also able to go to the mat when needed, wearing down opponents with various submissions to weaken the body parts he'll later blast with a second rope 450 splash or his signature Big Bang Attack.

DEFICIENCIES

If an opponent can weaken his legs, most of his offense will be greatly compromised. Also, he tends to throw in a lot of extra back-

ATTRIBUTES

Physical fitness fanatic has worked to put herself into peak condition through an intensive training program and disciplined diet over the past few years. Since her pro debut in 2009, Mia Yim has garnered attention because of her exotic look. However, she wasn't content with that. She has proven herself in battles against some of the top names in women's wrestling, including Cheerleader Melissa, Jessicka Havok, and LuFisto.

DEFICIENCIES

Yim has struggled to develop a killer instinct. When opponents are in a vulnerable position, she has been guilty of playing to the fans and taking too long to maneuver opponents into position for her signature finisher, the package piledriver. With a new start in TNA, she may learn that wins and losses matter; there's no such thing as style points.

BIO

Former collegiate volleyball player made her pro wrestling debut in 2009 and went on to train under Daizee Haze at the ROH Wrestling Academy. She had a stint as a valet for Prince Nana's Embassy and was booked for a tour of Japan after barely two years in the game. Yim debuted in SHINE in 2012 and SHIMMER in 2013 and quickly established herself as a spunky and charismatic wrestler who wouldn't back down from a challenge. She landed a spot on TNA's "Knockouts Knockdown" event in 2014 and scored an upset win over Brittany, despite not being under a TNA contract. Yim won the SHINE tag team title with Leva Bates in February 2014 and went on to unsuccessfully challenge Cheerleader Melissa for the SHIMMER championship in April 2014. In November 2014, she defeated Ivelisse for the SHINE title in Beijing, China. After losing that belt to Santana Garrett, she signed with TNA in April and goes by the name Jade as a member of the new Knockouts stable, The Dollhouse.



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING

PWI SCOUTING REPORT

Jade's star has been on the rise for some time now, and she finally has an opportunity to show her skills on a national stage. She has competed primarily as a fan favorite in recent years, and may struggle as a member of a rulebreaking stable—especially if she has to play second-banana to Taryn Terrell. Her technical skills have improved dramatically over the past two years, and she has found a level of comfort in the ring. She can stand out from the pack if she continues to utilize her unique ring style, which includes high-risk dives, strong-style striking, and lucha reversals. Brawling doesn't suit her. She has the talent to shine as long as she doesn't scale back on the things that made her stand out in the indies.

ENZO & CASS

HEIGHT: 5'11" (AMORE); 6'10" (CASSADY)
WEIGHT: 200 (AMORE); 276 (CASSADY)
AGE: 28 (BOTH)

TOP PWI 500 RANKING:

PRIMARY PROMOTION:

268 & 281 (2014)
(AMORE) (CASSADY)

NXT

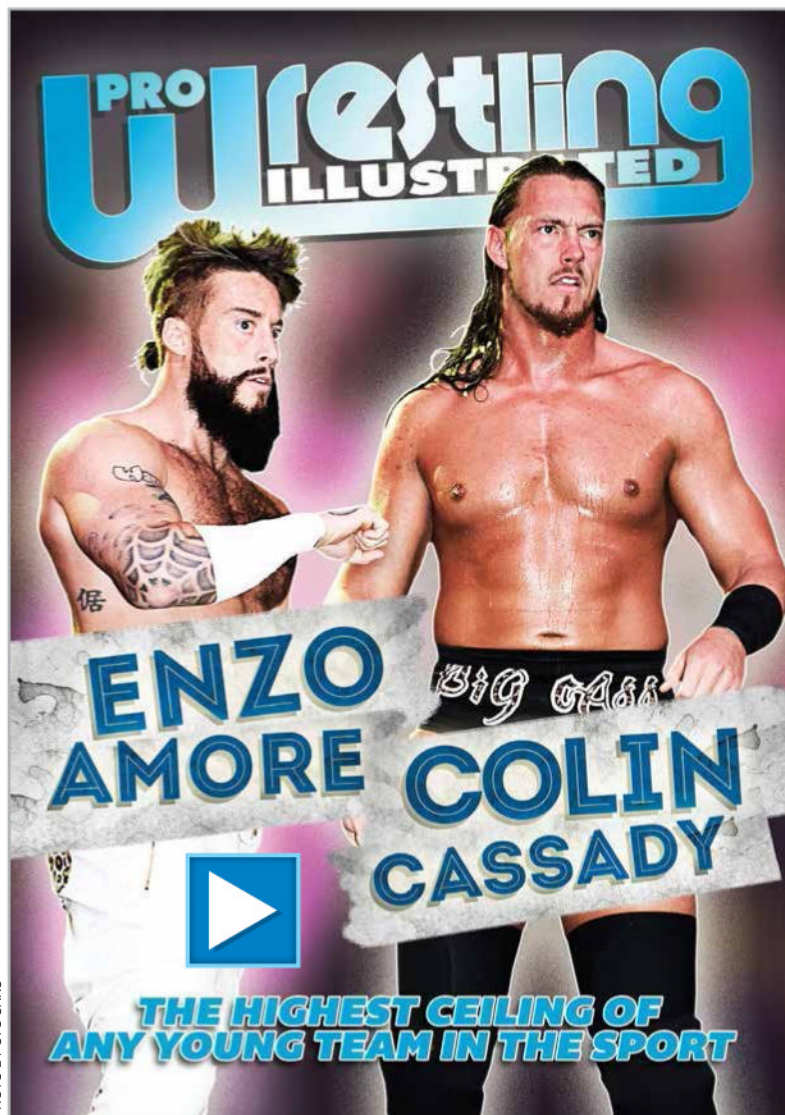


PHOTO BY STU SAKS

ATTRIBUTES

Humorous but capable; great chemistry, too. Enzo is quick on his feet and very resourceful in the ring, while "Cass" is an athletic, surprisingly agile giant. He's also deceptively smart, having studied pre-med and economics in college. Amore is the more acrobatic of the two, while Cassady does a great job of wearing down opponents before catapulting his partner from the top rope for the team's signature move. They also have a connection with fans, which can only help them as they attempt to move up the card.

DEFICIENCIES

Their sense of humor has helped to make them popular, but it's a double-edged sword. If

these two were both a bit more aggressive and focused, they'd have very likely won the NXT tag title by now. Cassady has most of the makings of an unstoppable monster but seems content to clown around. Beyond this, Carmella (the team's valet) has become a distraction.

BIO

Enzo and "Big Cass" go back a long way, as the two first met while playing basketball as teenagers. Neither man had much wrestling experience prior to signing developmental deals with WWE. Both played college sports: Amore was a linebacker at Salisbury University, while Cassady was a center for NYU's basketball team. Enzo used to work as a DJ, while Cassady was once a busker. At NXT, they took to each other naturally. They've had notable rivalries with several other teams since pairing up on television, particularly with The Legionnaires and Blake and Murphy. Recently, upwardly mobile Carmella has joined up with Amore and Cassady, which has led to some memorable, entertaining moments. The live NXT crowd at Full Sail University loves this tandem so much they

chant the team's entire, lengthy introduction verbatim at every taping.

PWI SCOUTING REPORT

Almost there. Enzo and Cassady are a solid pairing, with enough stamina and cunning between them to outwit and outperform most other teams. The amount of fan participation they inspire brings to mind The New Age Outlaws in their heyday. If they stay focused and perhaps bring a bit more aggression to their matches, they have a tremendous upside. It might truthfully be best for the team to part ways with Carmella. That way, they at least keep their eyes in the ring. Right now, they are a B+ team with A+ potential.

PRIMARY PROMOTIONS:

LUCHA UNDERGROUND,
 DRAGON GATE,
 PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA

TOP PWI 500 RANKING:

54 (2014)

HEIGHT: 5'9"

WEIGHT: 170

AGE: 26

PRINCE PUMA

ATTRIBUTES

When the masked Prince Puma debuted on Lucha Underground last year, many wrestling fans went searching to find out the identity of this mysterious luchador who was matching Johnny Mundo move-for-move. The man under the mask is no stranger to followers of independent and international circuits, where Puma competes as Ricochet. Widely considered to be one of the top aerialists in the sport today, Puma became the public face of Lucha Underground and has established himself as one of the most exciting competitors in the game. He is an innovative high-flyer with underrated striking skills and more than a decade of experience.

DEFICIENCIES

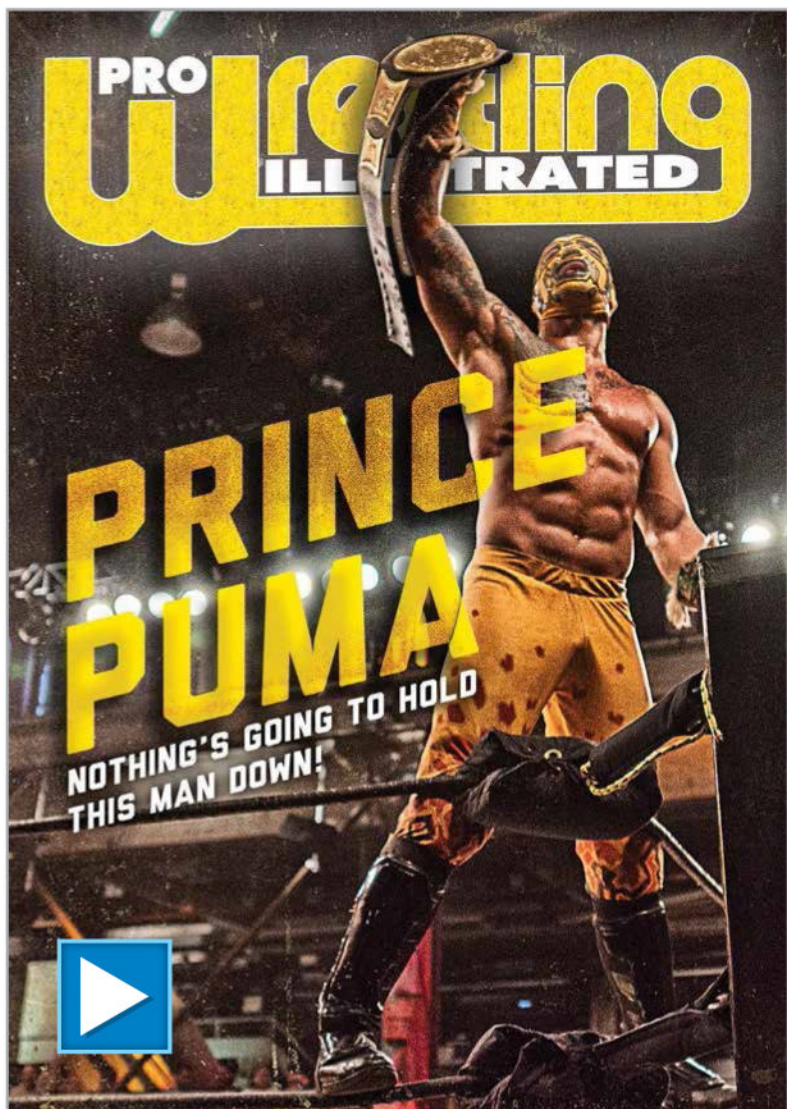
There's a reason Prince Puma lets Konnan do the talking for him in Lucha Underground—he's not great on the mic. While he has tremendous athletic ability, he's not blessed with natural charisma. The Prince Puma character adds intrigue; without the mask, he doesn't capture the imagination the same way.

BIO

Made his pro debut as Cameron Locke in 2004 and quickly made a name for himself for his daredevil antics in scramble and multiple-man bouts. He moved on to CHIKARA, eventually donning a mask and wrestling under the name of Helios, where he won the Young Lions Cup. In 2010, he began competing in PWG and in Dragon Gate USA and EVOLVE. In 2014, he scored the biggest victory of his career, beating KUSHIDA in the final of the New Japan Best of the Super Juniors Tournament. In late-2014, he debuted as Prince Puma in Lucha Underground. He became the first Lucha Underground champion by winning an Aztec Warfare battle royal in October 2014.

PWI SCOUTING REPORT

Lucha Underground made a smart move by building around Prince Puma. He is a dynamic wrestler.



The Prince Puma persona—and the addition of Konnan as his manager—made Ricochet more marketable and created more fan interest. From its very first broadcast, Lucha Underground introduced the world to a new star. Few wrestlers have the leaping ability and muscle control to execute the moves that Puma does. While opponents are sure to scout his 630 senton splash and shooting star press, Puma's brawling and striking skills are underrated. He can quickly take down an opponent with his kicks alone, without having to scale the ropes. Last year was his breakout year. Now, after having become the first American to win the Best of the Super Juniors and becoming the star of Lucha Underground, he has to prove he can sustain that success. Regaining the LU title from the massive Mil Muertes will be a major test.

JASON KINCAID

HEIGHT: 6'
WEIGHT: 205
AGE: 29

TOP PWI 500 RANKING:

357 (2014)

PRIMARY PROMOTIONS:

NWA-SMOKY MOUNTAIN,
ECWA

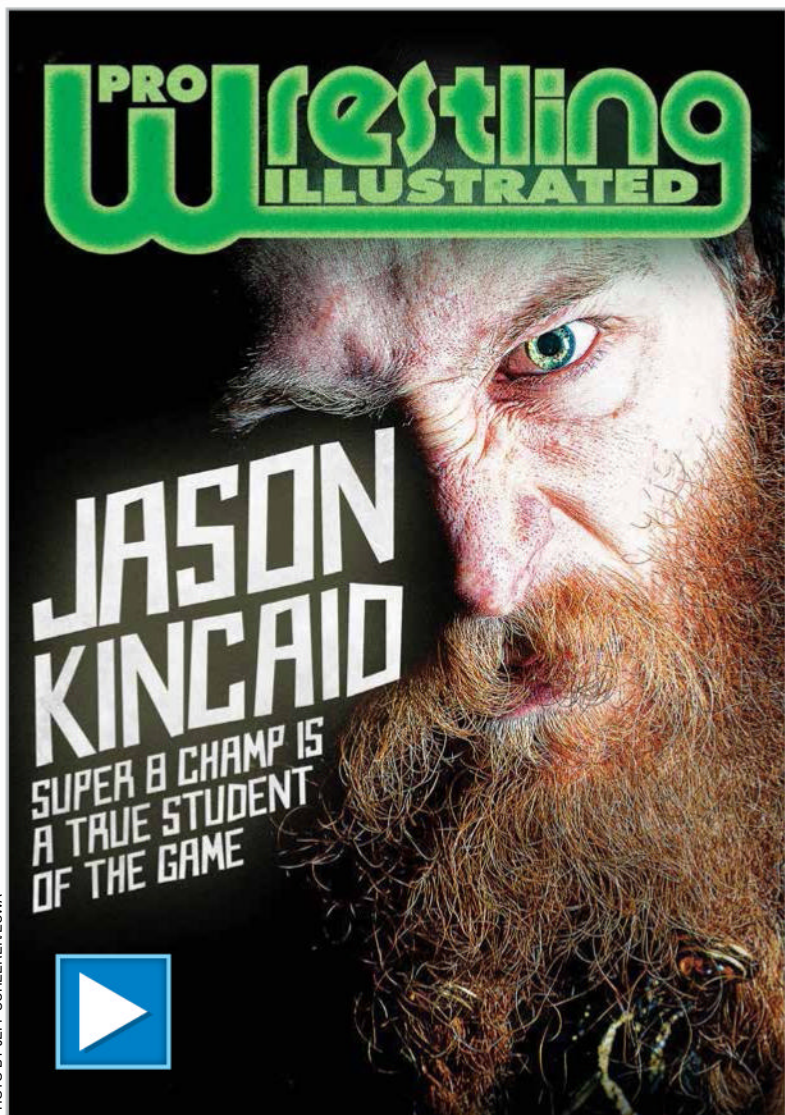


PHOTO BY JEFF SCHEER/ECWA

Wrestlers with thicker musculature or a broader frame are better able to absorb the inevitable bumps and falls when high-risk moves backfire. Kincaid's style and physique make him more susceptible to injury in the long term. He also tends to be overpowered in brawling situations and is at a disadvantage in close-quarters striking.

BIO

Trained by the Batten twins, Kincaid made his pro debut in 2003 in his native West Virginia. He competed throughout the Mid-Atlantic independent scene for several years, and completed his first tour of Mexico in 2011. That year, he captured the NWA-Smoky Mountain championship, which he still holds today, making him the longest-tenured champion throughout all of the NWA promotions. He captured the NWA junior heavyweight title in 2013, but lost it to his arch-rival, Chase Owens. He earned a title shot against then-NWA champion Rob Conway in December 2014. In April, he won the prestigious ECWA Super 8 Tournament, collecting wins over Kai Katana, Jaxson James, and Corey Hollis.

ATTRIBUTES

"The Gift" won over plenty of new fans when he emerged victorious the 2015 ECWA Super 8 Tournament, but those who were familiar with his work throughout the NWA had him pegged as the favorite to win all along. Though he looks like a hermit from the backwoods of Appalachia, Kincaid is an incredibly innovative competitor and excellent technical wrestler. He is constantly adding to his arsenal—both in terms of offensive moves and counters and escapes. He is one of the hardest working talents on the indy circuit.

DEFICIENCIES

Kincaid has a high-risk ring style and a lean, lanky frame. That's a dangerous combination.

PWI SCOUTING REPORT

Kincaid started wrestling at the age of 17 and proved to be something of a prodigy. He absorbs information like a sponge and has the innate ability to see a maneuver once and then execute it flawlessly. It took a few years before his physical capabilities could catch up with his mental abilities, but Kincaid has put everything together and developed into one of the most formidable light heavyweights in the game. A yoga devotee and naturalist, he spends as much time in meditation as he does in the gym, which, while unorthodox, keeps him grounded even in the most pressure-filled situations. Kincaid could stand to gain some additional muscle mass, and he could use some improvement when it comes to promos and interview skills, but from bell-to-bell, he is as solid a pure wrestler as you will find.

PRIMARY PROMOTIONS:

EVOLVE,
COMBAT ZONE WRESTLING,
DRAGON GATE USA

TOP PWI 500 RANKING:

94 (2014)

HEIGHT: 6'
WEIGHT: 185
AGE: 27

AR FOX

ATTRIBUTES

One of the more impressive aerial specialists today, Fox has become a hot commodity among indy promotions. He's competed in front of some of the harshest crowds in the U.S. and is tougher for having done so. He can be hard for opponents to predict, hold, or pin down. He can also strike pretty well, on top of his high-flying offense. His signature Lo Mein Pain maneuver is a move that is worth searching for on YouTube.

DEFICIENCIES

There is no way to perform some of the moves Fox does without suffering wear and tear, and various injuries have plagued his career. Because his offense is so high-risk, it can also leave him vulnerable to counter-attacks. He's made a career out of thrilling, acrobatic offense, but at what cost to him physically?

BIO

Trained by Mr. Hughes in Atlanta, Fox spent some of his formative time in Florida Championship Wrestling before lighting up the Northeast independent circuit. He fared well in Combat Zone Wrestling, where he would eventually capture the Wired TV title twice and junior heavyweight title once. He made it to the finals of the promotion's Best of the Best 11 tournament, before falling to Sami Callihan. He was among the most successful competitors in the early days of the EVOLVE promotion, eventually defeating Callihan in the finals of a tournament to crown its first champion. Fox would go on to hold that title for nearly a full year. He's also been successful as a tag wrestler, once capturing Dragon Gate USA's Open the United Gate title with CIMA. After nearly five years with EVOLVE,

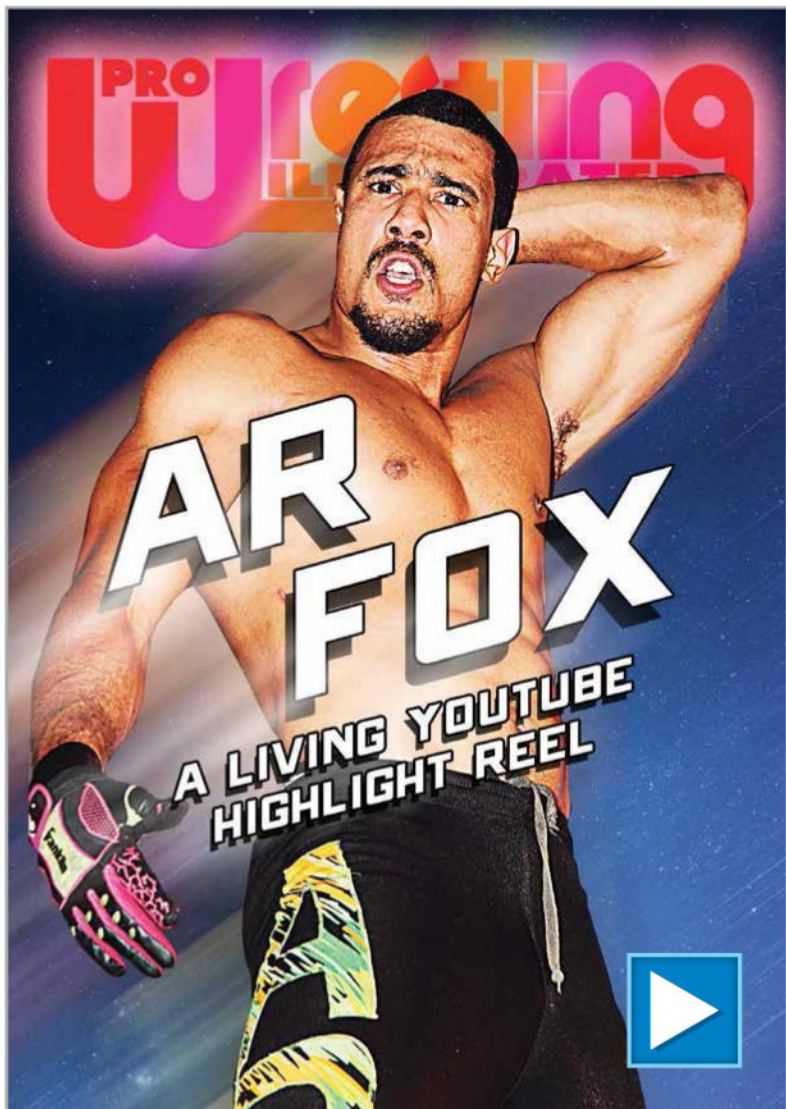


PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN

Fox announced that he and the promotion had parted ways in the spring. Indy fans await his next move with great interest.

PWI SCOUTING REPORT

Most anywhere Fox goes, there will be a place for him, and the rumor mill has been abuzz. We hope Fox has a five-year plan in place, and it'd be nice if it included a national promotion with a regular television audience. Stability is key at this point, and he should consider slowing things down ... at least a tad. One way to accomplish this would be to focus more on his ground and mat wrestling skills, even incorporating a submission hold or two.

RICH SWANN

HEIGHT: 5'8"
WEIGHT: 165
AGE: 24

TOP PWI 500 RANKING:

133 (2014)

PRIMARY PROMOTIONS:

**FULL IMPACT PRO,
DRAGON GATE**

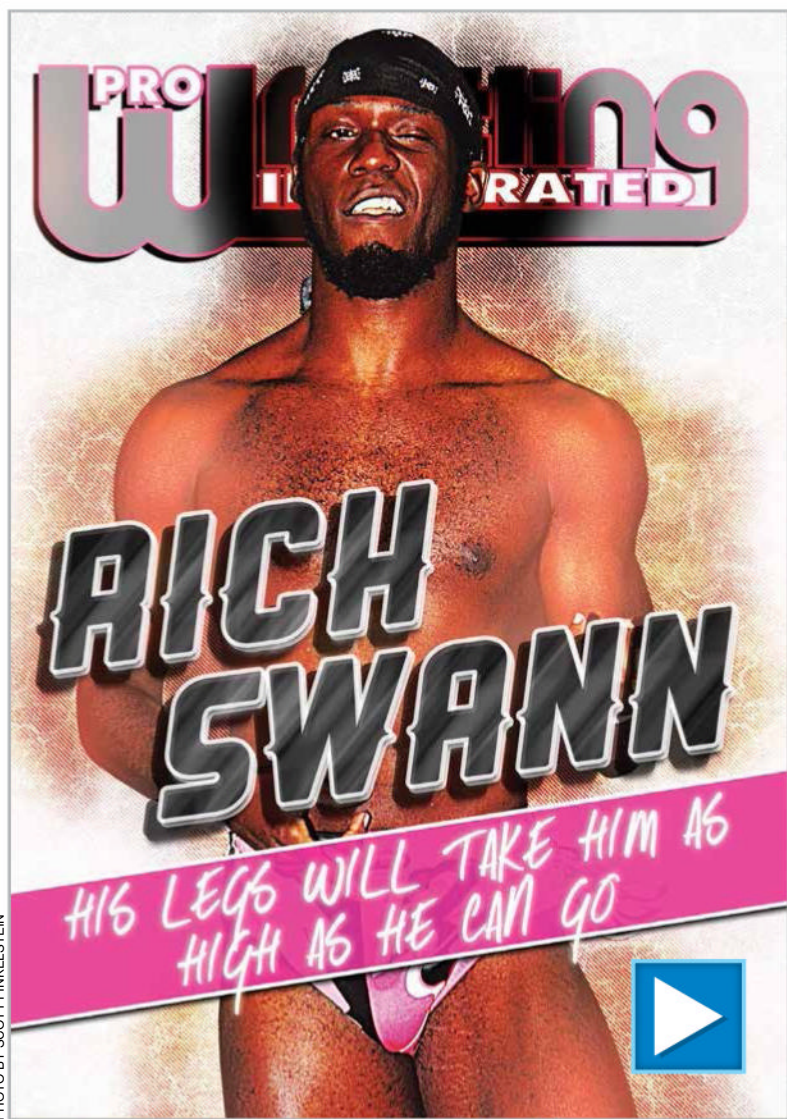


PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN

away the majority of his offense. A grappler who can parry the kicks and take control of one of Swann's legs stands a very good chance of beating him.

BIO

Swann made his pro debut in 2008, then moved on to Combat Zone Wrestling, where he continued his training. He began competing for Dragon Gate USA and EVOLVE in 2010 and went on to capture the DG Open the Owarai Gate, Open the Triangle Gate, and Open the United Gate tag team titles. In addition to his tours of Japan, he has also competed in Germany, the United Kingdom, Mexico, and China. He won the Full Impact pro heavyweight title for the second time in April, topping Roderick Strong.

PWI SCOUTING REPORT

Swann is an exciting wrestler in the style of The Young Bucks. He is quick to attack, quick to commit to a high-risk move ... and quick to make a mistake. That style makes him an exciting wrestler to watch, but it also makes him reckless. Swann's precision striking should allow him to control the pace of a match. But, instead of wearing down an opponent the conventional way and weakening them for a submission or finishing move, Swann seems to throw one big move after another, always going for that knockout punch. He has been known to use a variation of the Indian deathlock as a submission, but he rarely utilizes holds or other submission locks. As a result, he expends far more energy than he needs to in virtually every match. He's constantly jumping for flashy takedowns or to deliver high-angle kicks, when a less-strenuous low-level quick or single-leg takedown would be more effective. He wants to entertain, which is well and good ... but when he learns to simplify his game, he will have fewer losses and more championships to his credit.

ATTRIBUTES

Swann isn't blessed with height, but he has one of the best vertical leaps in the game. His offense is built largely around kicks, which he hits with precision from several angles. He also puts his leaping ability to work with a variety of headscissors takedowns and hurricanranas. His high-paced style is exciting to watch and hard to defend. He is an expert mid-to-long-range striker.

DEFICIENCIES

Swann knows only one speed: full. He can struggle against an opponent who can ground him. If you take away Swann's legs, you take

ATTRIBUTES

When he left Japan for Mexico in 2013, he was known primarily for his hard chop. Used his Mexican excursion for a complete reevaluation of his career. T-Hawk has since not only adopted the colors of the Mexican National flag for his gear, but also took a significant part of his move arsenal from his time in Mexico that can be described as formative.

DEFICIENCIES

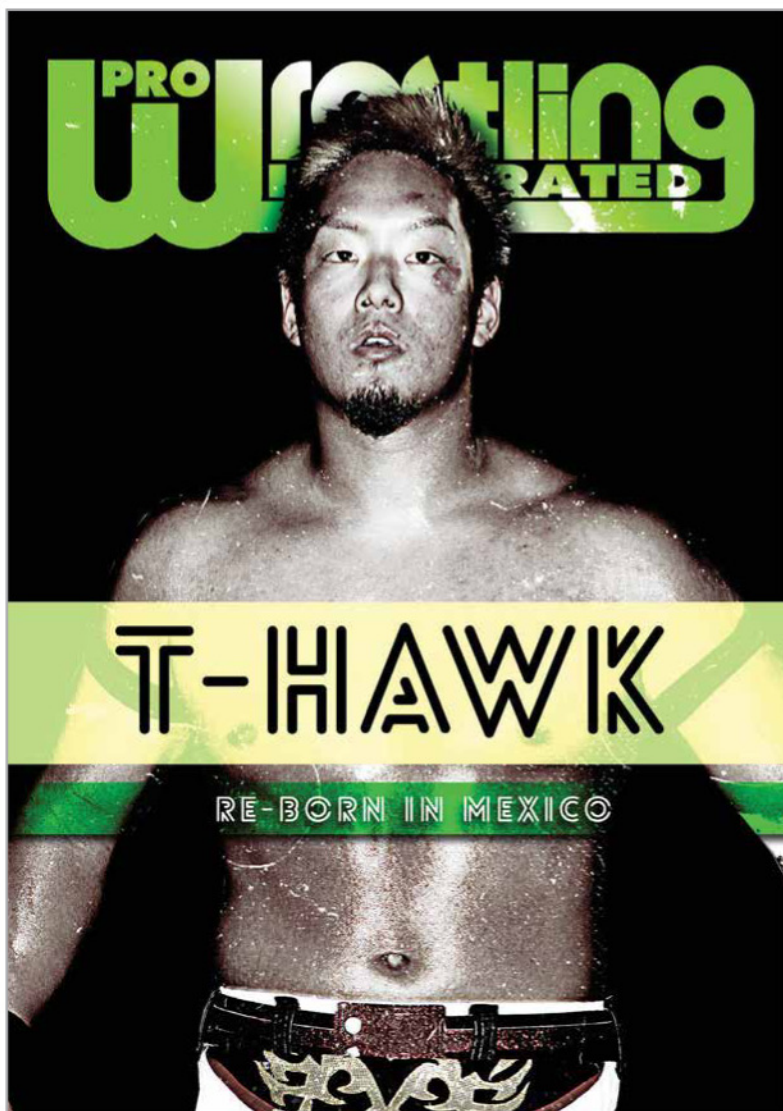
Although T-Hawk is able to cover his deficiencies in multi-man matches, they are very visible in singles action. He often uses the same formula in his singles bouts and thus is somewhat predictable. T-Hawk clearly lacks the versatility he needs to be more successful at this young stage of his career.

BIO

The former university baseball player made his pro wrestling debut in March 2010 as Takuya Tomakomai, utilizing both the name of his hometown as well as his university. He took the path of a typical Dragon Gate rookie by wrestling lower-card matches before being picked up by Blood Warriors as Tomahawk TT. Stole Naoki Tanizaki's character and claimed to be him before leaving for Mexico and the U.S. Has been very successful since returning to Japan, winning the Twin Gate title four times and the Triangle Gate title three times. Reached the King of Gate finals last year, but lost to Jimmy Susumu.

PWI SCOUTING REPORT

Being a millennial is what T-Hawk has centered his career around since



returning from Mexico. He portrays himself as a cool, tanned guy who is pretty unapproachable except by his peers. To climb up the ranks, he will have to work on this attitude and be open to new ideas and coalitions. Regardless of that, the future looks bright for the 25-year-old. The five-year pro is part of a new crop of Dragon Gate wrestlers who don't only rely on their high-flying skills, but whose style can be described as a mix of power and technique. T-Hawk has all the tools to not only win more tag team gold, but to be also a successful singles competitor to lead the popular Japanese promotion into the next generation.

the BUSINESS PAGE

by HARRY BURKETT

WHO IS destined for Destination America?

... While the recent TNA-ROH-Destination America controversy seems to be a big victory for Ring of Honor, TNA President Dixie Carter must be holding out hope that she can reach a deal with Destination America to continue *Impact Wrestling* on the network, with *Ring Of Honor*

Wrestling being a sister program of sorts.

Will that be the likely scenario this fall? Odds are against it. But would it be a good idea? Absolutely.

As the relationship now exists, Destination America—with *ROH Wrestling* at 8 p.m. Eastern, *Impact* at 9 p.m., and *ROH Wrestling* repeated at 11

p.m.—now hosts the second-most powerful block of wrestling programming on television, next to *WWE Monday Night Raw* on USA.

Wouldn't this be the ideal scenario this fall? Ring of Honor probably shouldn't dilute its product by extending to two hours. But at least two to three hours are necessary to create a substantial block of programming, so *Impact* would be a necessary component.

When *The Wrestling Observer* broke the story that Destination America would be canceling *Impact* this fall, many in the media assumed the network changed its mind about the value of wrestling. Despite *Impact Wrestling's* status as Destination America's top-rated show, sponsors were turned off by the wrestling stigma or believed that wrestling fans weren't the kind of consumers they wanted to attract. With Destination America's sudden addition of ROH, it's apparent that DA still wanted wrestling, but perhaps not for the amount TNA charges for programming.

David Zaslav, president and CEO of Discovery Communications—which owns over 15 cable channels, ranging from Destination America and Investigation Discovery (ID) to the Oprah Winfrey Network and TLC—is cable media's current golden boy because of his ability to breathe life into these long-struggling brands, mostly through the development of so-called low-brow programming. Combining TNA and ROH into a power block would be typical of Zaslav's marketing savvy and the programming strategy he has implemented throughout his networks.

So could this be an ingenious, Zaslavian move at Destination America? Or are they just going to hand over *Impact's* time slot to *Mountain Monsters*?



PHOTO COURTESY OF DISCOVERY COMMUNICATIONS

We may not know Destination America's full strategy for TNA and ROH programming, but Discovery Communications CEO David Zaslav sure does. Zaslav is renowned for boosting his companies' sagging brands.

WWE Network paying in dividends

... The financial media has been very effective at scaring investors over the past year, asserting WWE would never sufficiently monetize the WWE Network's over-the-top business model to replace its diminishing pay-per-view revenue. But the WWE Network—despite the gloomy prediction of many analysts—reached one million subscribers in late-January. And now comes this news:

WWE generated its highest quarterly

revenue in history between January and March, earning subscribers, thanks mostly to WrestleMania 31, which became \$176.2-million. The WWE the most-viewed 'Mania in Network reached 1.3 million history. According to WWE's



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

If she's willing to get physically involved with Ronda Rousey, Stephanie McMahon probably deserves whatever she earns at WWE. The chief brand officer was at the forefront of WWE's record-setting first quarter.

WWE STOCKWATCH

[FOR THE PERIOD OF APRIL 5, 2015 TO JUNE 5, 2015]

60-DAY HIGH: 15.44 on April 30

60-DAY LOW: 9.82 on April 6

52-WEEK HIGH: 30.39 on March 3, 2015

52-WEEK LOW: 9.82 on February 2, 2015

The release of WWE's first quarter report created a volatile day for company stock on April 30, with shares fluctuating between a high of 15.44 and a low of 13.26. An initial positive reaction to WWE's unexpectedly high revenue eventually fell prey to nagging doubts about the WWE Network's business model and overall strategy.

In addition to WrestleMania 31's extraordinary success in the first quarter, WWE's renegotiations of television rights fees with NBC Universal and several international entities resulted in a 43 percent increase in that sector, bringing TV revenue to \$58.2-million. Compared to the same quarter last year, the increases in WWE Network and rights fees more than offset the company's decreases, including reduced home video sales, the loss of digital content revenue (because Internet pay-per-view offerings were moved from wwe.com to the Network), and the folding of *WWE Magazine*.

In boardroom news, Chief Brand Officer Stephanie McMahon has adopted a 10b5-1 stock trading plan for a trust she initiated in 2004. It allows for a brokerage firm to buy or sell shares of Class B common stock between August 10 and December 31. In May, McMahon authorized certain transactions to be completed if predetermined price conditions were met. By setting these financial goals ahead of time, McMahon complies with Securities & Exchange Commission regulations designed to avoid stock-value manipulation and alleviate the market impact of such sales.

first-quarter report, Network subscriptions and traditional pay-per-view buys (which dropped to 259,000 this year) earned a total of \$37.6-million. In the second quarter of 2014, which included WrestleMania 30, that number was \$43.2-million—a \$5.6-million drop, but a mild decrease considering the cannibalism fears expressed over the past year.

Laying the Smackdown on USA ... *Smackdown* will switch from its current cable home, Syfy, to its bigger sister network, USA Network, in the first quarter of 2016. USA executives have been eager to land *Smackdown* for some time, and it makes sense for WWE, which can create more synergy between the two programs on the same network.

Smackdown—despite its reliably strong ratings—has been bumped from one network to another several times during its 16-year run. Although it isn't entirely certain whether *Smackdown* will continue airing on Thursday nights, the move is expected to boost the program's numbers overall.

TV BREAKDOWN

RAW [USA]

—VIEWERS IN MILLIONS

April 6: 3.96
 April 13: 3.67
 April 20: 4.04
 April 27: 3.76
 May 4: 3.57
 May 11: 3.69
 May 18: 4.00
 May 25: 3.60
 June 1: 3.97

Analysis: *Raw* suffered its largest one-week decline since 2012 when it dropped from a one-year high of 3.7 on March 30 (the episode immediately following WrestleMania 31) to 2.8 on April 6. More than ever, it seems the WWE calendar and viewer interest is determined by the WrestleMania timetable. *Raw* nose-dived again on April 13, perhaps due to the fact that it was a taped program, not live, emanating from Great Britain. A jump in the male age 18 to 34 demographic helped the show rebound on April 20 with 4.04 million viewers. Keep in mind that April is usually a tough month, with *Raw* going up against the NCAA basketball tournament finals and the NBA playoffs. *Raw* is still suffering from the third-hour blues, with viewers dropping off after the segment airing at 10 p.m. Eastern.

SMACKDOWN [SYFY]

—VIEWERS IN MILLIONS

April 9: 2.63
 April 16: 2.45
 April 23: 2.64
 April 30: 2.34
 May 7: 2.58
 May 14: 2.53
 May 21: 2.59
 May 28: 2.58
 June 4: 2.35

Analysis: As with *Raw*, *Smackdown's* ratings tumbled on April 16 when it aired from the United Kingdom. This is puzzling; the fact that it was a taped show shouldn't have had an effect, considering *Smackdown* is always a taped show. Wouldn't *Smackdown* airing from the U.K. make it more of a novelty to watch? It was a dismal 1.7 Nielsen rating, not much better than the lowest-rated show on January 9, *Smackdown's* final Friday night airing. *Smackdown* hasn't reached a 2.0 rating on Thursday nights except for its January 29 live episode, the week after The Royal Rumble. WWE has notably increased the star-power and match quality for *Smackdown* since switching to Thursdays. Moving to USA in early-2016 should help these numbers. Maybe an NXT talent influx can boost *Raw* and *Smackdown*.

IMPACT [DESTINATION AMERICA]

—VIEWERS IN MILLIONS

April 3: .44
 April 10: .58
 April 17: .57
 April 24: .57
 May 1: .55
 May 8: .46
 May 15: .52
 May 22: .32
 May 29: .57
 June 3: .29

Analysis: Before *Impact Wrestling's* rumored cancellation, the assumption was that Destination America executives were pleased whenever the show reached its usual plateau of a half-million viewers. An exception occurred on May 22 when TNA ran a repeat of last year's "Destination X" special instead of its normal program. The number of viewers plummeted to

320,000. For all the nail-biting in TNA, *Impact Wrestling's* numbers should increase due to episodes of *Ring Of Honor Wrestling* book-ending its show. By the way, the combined viewer numbers for ROH's premiere airings on June 3 (at 8 p.m. and 11 p.m.) was 247,000. *Impact* dropped considerably, due to the move to Wednesday night, with only 290,000 viewers.

TV MATCH OF THE MONTH



JOHN CENA
 VS. SAMI ZAYN,
 RAW, MAY 4

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IMPACT



DESTINATION
AMERICA

WEDNESDAYS
9 E/P

INDEPENDENT ROUNDUP

BY MIKE BESSLER

IN A SELFLESS act of real-life heroism, lady grappler **Allie Parker** has put her promising wrestling career on hold to help a family member overcome a life-threatening condition. Parker recently donated a kidney to her brother, **Ryan**, who has suffered from juvenile diabetes for over two decades, enduring kidney failure and dialysis treatments for the past four years. Via her personal blog, Allie thanked fans and well-wishers for their concern, expressing a little trepidation about the future.

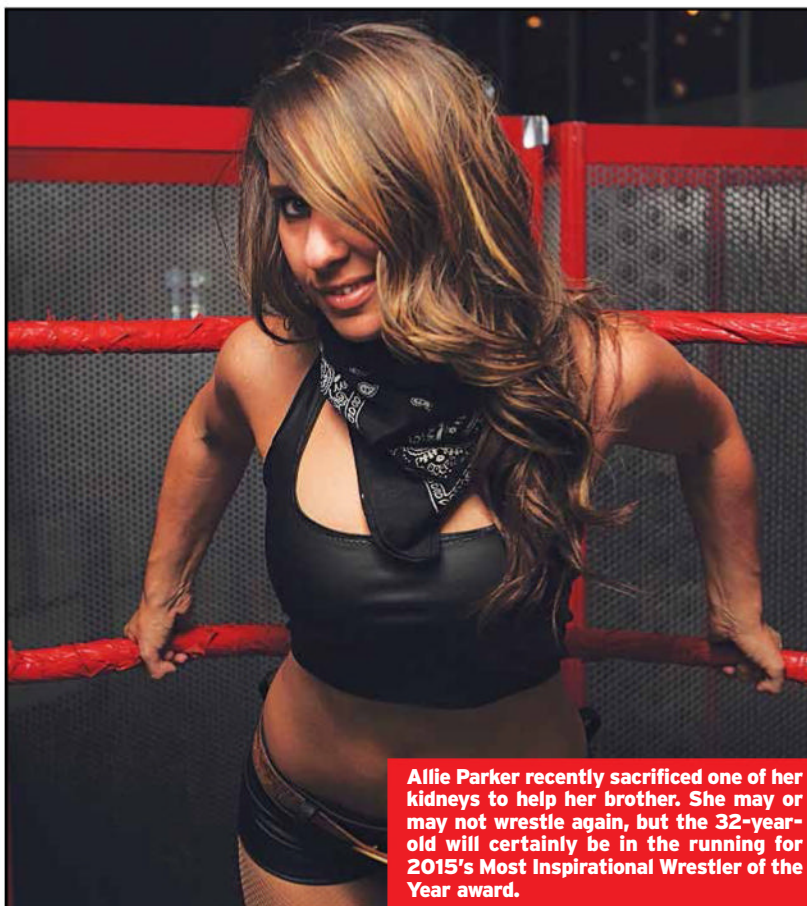
¶“In these days, I’ve seen a lot of love and caring from those I never expected it from, and have also seen some [people who] I thought would be what got me through this pretty much abandon me. I’m so grateful for those that are here for me right now because although this might not be a big surgery or a big deal to some, it is to me. It will change my life, and my brother’s. Those folks that are taking my mind off of this nerve-racking moment with their unselfish attitudes, please know that you will forever be in my heart.”

¶Allie and Ryan underwent surgery on June 1. She is optimistic regarding her brother’s recovery as well as her present condition. ¶“I’m doing okay,” Allie told *PWI*. “It’s painful to walk, so I am taking it slow. Otherwise, I’m doing well.” ¶The transplant is expected to drastically improve her brother’s quality of life, but

Allie is uncertain as to whether or not she’ll be able to ever return to action in the squared circle. While she won’t rule out an occasional match down the road, Parker has indicated that any future in-ring work will be few and far between.

The forces of The Empire descended upon Dyersburg, Tennessee, in May, as **Tim Storm**, **Matt Riviera**, **Greg Anthony**,

and **Steve Anthony** dominated the NWA Mid South card in every respect. With longtime advisor and mentor **J.J. Dillon** calling the shots from ringside, TCW champ Storm received the NWA Mid-South unified championship by default after **Gaylon Summers** failed to show up to defend the strap. Storm defended his gold against **Jason Peter Rose** the same night, coming out on top with the help of his cronies.



Allie Parker recently sacrificed one of her kidneys to help her brother. She may or may not wrestle again, but the 32-year-old will certainly be in the running for 2015's Most Inspirational Wrestler of the Year award.

PHOTO BY CRAIG TOVEY



Had Super Fly not interfered, Sexy Star in all likelihood would have beaten Pentagon Jr. in their submission match. Star was forced to tap to Pentagon Jr.'s surfboard chinlock, but it would have been a lot worse had Vampiro not come to her aid.

In other action, Greg Anthony took on **Jason Kincaid** in a match that spanned the better part of 20 minutes. Anthony bested Kincaid after Jason's manager, **Boyd Bradford**, tuned on his client, setting up a golden opportunity for a curb stomp by his rival. Riviera successfully defended his NWA Western Heritage title against **Elliott Russell**, and Steve Anthony retained the NWA junior heavyweight strap when he beat **Roderick Strong**.

As of late, **Sexy Star's** been on the receiving end of some hard knocks by some of the roughest rudos in Lucha Underground. Star thought she was doing the right thing a while back when she stopped **Pentagon Jr.** from breaking **Super Fly's** arm. Lucha Underground promoter **Dario Cueto** isn't a big fan of sportsmanship, though, and on his order, Star and Fly were ordered to face off in a mask-vs.-mask match. Star, certainly no stranger to intergender matches, prevailed and Super Fly relinquished his

mask. ¶ Although Star and Fly made nice after the bout, Pentagon Jr. crashed the scene, checking the female luchador outside and then revising his beef with Super Fly by breaking his arm in the middle of the ring. ¶ Pentagon and Star subsequently squared off in Lucha Underground's first-ever submission match. After some brutal back-and-forth action, Star, wrestling at a 75-pound disadvantage, seemingly had victory in hand with a single-leg Boston crab. But Super Fly crashed the party and took out Star, ostensibly serving up a bit of belated payback for his previous loss to the lucha lady. Pentagon Jr. finished Sexy Star with a surfboard chinlock, earning a tapout, but he wasn't quite ready to call it a day. He was determined to snap Star's arm in two. Fortunately, **Vampiro** left his spot at the announce table and charged the ring, ultimately putting the kibosh on Pentagon's dastardly intentions.

Mighty Mississippian **Barry Wolf** needs a bigger awards

cabinet to house all of his title gold. The indy journeyman captured the Pro Wrestling EGO title on May 23 in Canton when he defeated **Joe Kane** in a lumberjack match. Wolf already held five other heavyweight titles concurrently heading into the EGO event, including gold from Mississippi's OWO and IWF promotions, as well as Alabama-based Combat Pro Sports ... **Drew Galloway** retained the DGUSA Open the Freedom Gate championship title, beating **Biff Busick** at EVOLVE 43. Galloway was back in action the following night, making a successful defense against Roderick Strong ... **Crazy Mary Dobson** and **Tessa Blanchard** landed the main event spot for RESISTANCE-Pro's May 9 event in Summit, Illinois. Blanchard dazzled the crowd with skill and athleticism, but it was Dobson who ultimately earned the three-count ... **AR Fox** outlasted four other competitors to become the first-ever Legacy Wrestling champion in a five-way main event contest at the promotion's June 6 show in Palmyra, Pennsylvania. Fox earned the win by putting **J.T. Dunn** down for the three-count, but when Legacy General Manager **Kevin Murphy** emerged to present Fox with the belt, he delivered a clothesline instead. A vicious beatdown ensued as Murphy was joined in the ring by **Eddie Smooth**, **Laszlo Arpad**, **Bookoo Buck\$**, and **Richie Nightmare** ... **BLK Jeez** held on to the CZW heavyweight, staving off a savage challenge from "**Bulldozer**" **Matt Tremeont** at the company's Proving Grounds show in May. □

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

BY DAN MURPHY

A TRIO OF lucha libre legends beat out a field of international stars as the team of **Alberto El Patron**, **Rey Mysterio Jr.**, and **Mysteziz** won the inter-promotional Lucha Libre World Cup tournament on May 17 in Mexico City.

The event was presented by the AAA promotion and featured talent from TNA, Ring of Honor, Lucha Underground (which is affiliated with AAA), All Japan Pro Wrestling, and Pro Wrestling NOAH, as well as Mexican wrestlers not under contract to AAA.

The tournament consisted of eight trios (six-man tag) bouts, each with a 15-minute time-limit.

If a match ended in a time-limit draw, each team would nominate one member to wrestle in a five-minute Iron Man bout. Other teams participating in the tournament included Team AAA (**El Hijo del Fantasma**, **El Texano Jr.**, and **Psycho Clown**), Team MexLeyendas (**Dr. Wagner Jr.**, **Blue Demon Jr.**, and **El Solar**), Team Rest of the World (**Drew Galloway**, **Angelico**, **El Mesias**), Team TNA/Lucha Underground (**Matt Hardy**, **Johnny Mundo**, and **Mr. Anderson**), Team USA (**Moose**, **ACH**, and **Brian Cage**), Team NOAH (**Taiji Ishimori**, **Yoshihiro Takayama**, and **Atsushi Kotoge**), and Team All Japan

(**Kenzo Suzuki**, **Tiger Mask III**, and **Masamune**).

Billed as "The Dream Team," El Patron, Mysterio, and Mysteziz defeated Team NOAH in the opening round and Team USA in the semifinals to advance to the finals. Team TNA/LU also advanced to the finals, earning wins over Team Rest of the World and Team MexLeyendas. The two teams proved to be evenly matched as the trios match ended in a 15-minute draw.

For the sudden-death five-minute overtime match, Mysteziz was selected to face Mr. Anderson, but that match also ended in a draw. Hardy then squared off against El Patron, which also ended in a



Rey Mysterio Jr.'s 619 sets up his overtime victory over Johnny Mundo, enabling The Dream Team (Mysterio, Alberto El Patron, and Mysteziz) to capture the Lucha Libre World Cup tournament in Mexico City.

PHOTO BY JERRY VILLAGRANA

draw. Mysterio scored a win over Mundo to earn the win for The Dream Team.

Team USA captured third place as Cage defeated Dr. Wagner Jr. in a singles sudden-death match. Wagner suffered a scary cervical sprain in the match, but was able to return to the ring less than a week later.

Following the event, Mysterio dedicated the victory to the late **Perro Aguayo Jr.**

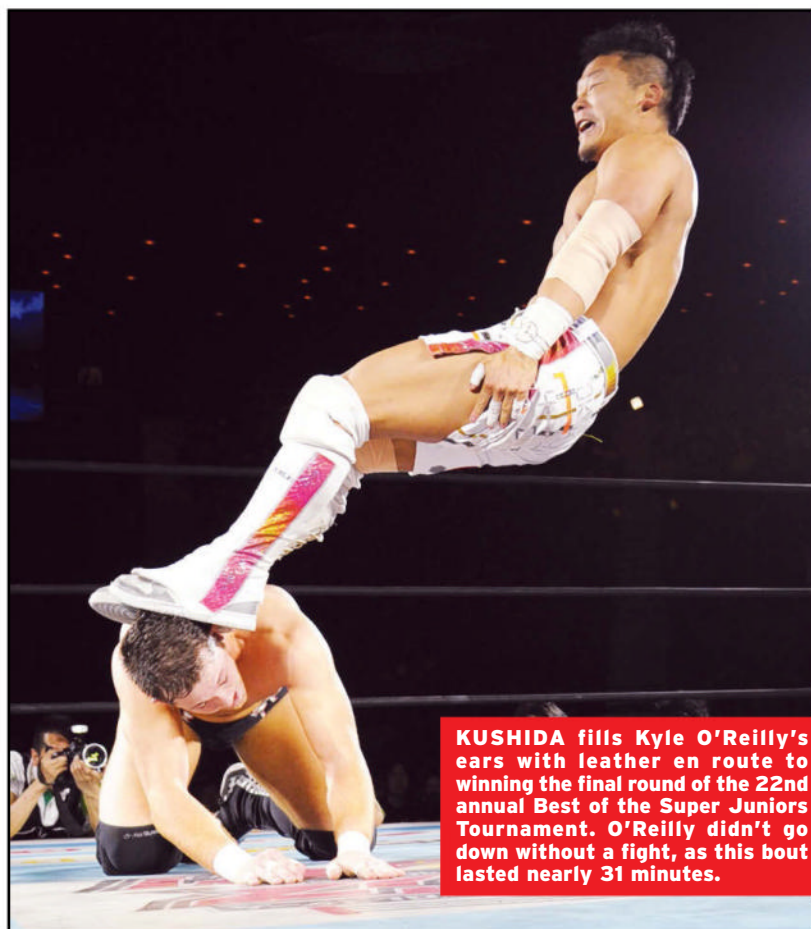
KUSHIDA won New Japan's 22nd annual Best of the Super Juniors Tournament, which took place from May 22 through June 7. The Best of the Super Juniors event is one of the most highly regarded and prestigious tournaments in wrestling.

In the tournament finals, KUSHIDA faced American **Kyle O'Reilly**, with KUSHIDA winning the bout at the 30:45 mark. For the second consecutive year, IWGP junior heavyweight champion **Kenny Omega** defied tradition and did not participate in the tournament. With his win, KUSHIDA earned a future title shot against Omega.

Though he finished with a disappointing record of three wins and four losses in the tournament, **Barbaro Cavernario** still has reason to celebrate. Cavernario won the CMLL Mexican National welterweight title from Titan on May 3 in Mexico City.

Just two weeks after his 46th birthday, former sumo wrestling champion **Akebono** regained one of the most historically significant championships in Japan, beating **Go Shiozaki** for the All Japan Pro Wrestling Triple Crown championship. Akebono had previously held that title in 2013.

Best remembered by U.S. fans for his exhibition "sumo match" against **The Big Show** at WrestleMania 21, the 500-pounder has been beset by health problems and injuries in recent years. However, Akebono earned a title shot



KUSHIDA fills Kyle O'Reilly's ears with leather en route to winning the final round of the 22nd annual Best of the Super Juniors Tournament. O'Reilly didn't go down without a fight, as this bout lasted nearly 31 minutes.

by winning the 2015 Champion Carnival tournament, beating four-time Triple Crown champion **Suwama** in the finals.

Akebono also recently held the All Japan tag team title, as he and **Yutaka Yoshie** reigned from March 22 until May 6, when they lost the belts to Shiozaki and **Kento Miyahara**.

All Japan also crowned a new GAORA TV champion on June 4 when **SUSHI** defeated **Kenso**. This is SUSHI's second GAORA TV title reign.

In other New Japan news, **Hirooki Goto** ended **Shinsuke Nakamura's** Intercontinental championship reign, scoring a surprise win over "The King Of Strong Style" on May 3 in Fukuoka, Japan. That same night, **The Young Bucks** won the IWGP junior heavyweight tag team title for the third time, winning a three-

way bout over champions **Trent Barreta** and **Rocky Romero** and Kyle O'Reilly and **Bobby Fish**.

Chris Hero showed that he has stamina and toughness to spare during a two-day span in Toronto. On June 6, Hero wrestled a hard-hitting bout against **Samoa Joe** in SMASH Wrestling. The following day, he participated in an Infinity Gauntlet match to benefit ALS. Hero agreed to wrestle for at least 30 minutes, against multiple opponents, if necessary (if a match ended sooner than 30 minutes, he would remain in the ring and face another competitor immediately afterward). For every \$500 pledged, Hero would wrestle another 30 minutes. By the time the gauntlet ended, Hero had wrestled 17 matches, totaling more than three hours of wrestling time. The gauntlet raised a total of \$3,440 for ALS. □

ARENA REPORTS

We encourage promoters and readers to e-mail results to:

PWResults@yahoo.com

Please try to utilize the exact format you see in the "Arena Reports." Also, please distinguish between handicap matches and three- or four-way matches. And, when reporting the result of a handicap match, indicate the number of competitors and who was the last man eliminated. Finally, please note pinfall finishes. Following these guidelines will help us greatly and make it more likely that your report will be used.

SPOTLIGHT CARD OF THE MONTH

PENNSYLVANIA

PHILADELPHIA—ROH War of the Worlds, Night 2, at 2300 Arena: **Romantic Touch** pinned **J. Diesel** ... **Adam Page** pinned **Watanabe** ... **Michael Elgin** pinned **KUSHIDA** ... **Tetsuya Naito** pinned **Kyle O'Reilly** ... **Shinsuke Nakamura** defeated **Jushin Liger**, **Mark Briscoe**, & **Jay Lethal** in a four-way ... **Hiroshi Tanahashi** pinned **Roderick Strong** ... Tag team champions **The Addiction** (**Christopher Daniels** & **Kazarian**) defeated **Kazuchika Okada** & **Gedo** ... Heavyweight champion **Jay Briscoe** pinned **Bobby Fish** ... **The Kingdom** (**Matt Taven** & **Michael Bennett**) & **Adam Cole** beat **The Young Bucks** (**Matt & Nick Jackson**) & **AJ Styles**. (05-13-15)

—Spotlight photos by Scott Finkelstein

CALIFORNIA

SOUTH GATE—Alternative Wrestling Show at American Legion Post #335: **Andy Brown** & **R.J. Ruiz** beat **Mondo Vega** & **Jacob Tarasso** ... **Vandal Drummond**, **Warhog**, & **Human Tornado** beat **El Ridelucoso**, **Jarek Matthews**, & **Hector Canales** ... **Mikey O'Shea** pinned **Sinn Bodhi** ... **Raze** & **Sage Sin Supreme** beat **Buggy Nova** & **Kitana Vera** ... **Biggie Biggz** & **The Haystack Brothers** beat **Revolution** (**Sasha Drevko**, **Che Cabrera**, & **Fidel Bravo**) and **The L.A. F'ers** (**Piloto Suicida**, **Shamu Jr.**, & **Dr. Maldad**) in a three-way ... Tag team champions **PPRay** (**Peter Avalon** & **Ray Rosas**) beat **Tyler Bateman** & **Famous B** in a non-title match ... **Ryan Taylor** pinned **Scorpio Sky** ... **B-Boy**, **Lil Cholo**, **SoCal Crazy**, & **Rick Knox** beat **Joey Ryan**, **Rico Dynamite**, **Tito Escondido**, & **Justin Borden**. (05-15-15)

—Chad Simplicio

COLORADO

BROOMFIELD—WWE at the 1st Bank Center: **Adrian Neville** pinned **Bad News Barrett** ... **Erick Rowan** beat **Bo Dallas** ... **Naomi** defeated **Emma** ... **Damien Sandow** beat **Heath Slater** ... **Ryback** pinned **Rusev** ... **Fandango** defeated **Adam Rose** ... Tag team champions **New Day** defeated **The Ascension** and **Tyson Kidd & Cesaro** in a three-way ... **Dean Ambrose** beat **Luke Harper** in a streetfight. (05-08-15)

—Bill Montgomery

DELAWARE

NEWARK—WWE at the Bob Carpenter Center: **Adrian Neville** beat **Bad News Barrett** ... **Lucha Dragons** (**Sin Cara** & **Kalisto**) beat **Los Matadores** (**Diego** & **Fernando**) ... **R-Truth** pinned **Stardust** ... **Ryback** pinned **Bray Wyatt** ... **Emma** pinned **Alicia Fox** ... **Natalya** beat **Alicia Fox** by submission ... **Sheamus** pinned **Dolph Ziggler** ... **Roman Reigns** beat **Kane** in a streetfight. (05-16-15)

—Lorraine Waits

FLORIDA

YBOR CITY—SHINE Wrestling at the Orpheum: **Leva Bates** pinned **Tessa Blanchard** ... **Amber Gallows** pinned **Xandra Bale** ... **Leah Von Dutch** beat **Thunderkitty** by submission ... **Andrea** & **Jayne Jameson** beat **Crazy Mary Dobson** & **Kimberly** ... **Allysin Kay** pinned **Tracy Taylor** ... **La Rosa Negra** pinned **Taylor Made** in a brass knuckles-on-a-pole match ... Tag team champions **Cherry Bomb** & **Kimber Lee** defeated **Brandi Wine** & **Malia Hosaka** ... **Jessicka Havok** pinned **Su Yung** in an anything-goes match ... Champion **Santana Garrett** pinned **Mia Yim**. (05-15-15)

—Al Haft

PORT ST. LUCIE—Championship Wrestling Entertainment at the Civic Center: **Chasyn Rance** pinned **Ace Andrews** ... **Tyrannus** beat **Russell Payne** and **Kye Ruffolo** in a three-way ... **Nathan Vain** pinned **Ushaka** ... **Gabriel Black** beat **Nathan Vain** by DQ ... **Lince Dorado** pinned **Jesus DeLeon** ... Tag team champs **Mike Patrick** & **Leo Brien** beat **Johann Ramzes** & **Ace Slater** ... **Joey Mayberry** beat heavyweight

FENTON—1st State Championship Wrestling at the 1CW Arena: **JT Funk** won the 10-man Autism Battle Royal ... **Styles Stable** (**Adam Flash**, **Rockin' Rebel**, & **Sinister X**) defeated **Gee Vader**, **Kekoa Mana**, & **Funky White Boy** ... **Leaders of the New School** (**Joe Kerr** & **Travis Banks**) defeated **The Hot Lanta' Hustlers** (**Marcus** & **Muddy Waters**) by DQ ... **Eric Chapel** pinned **Ricky Reyes** ... **Jimmy Dream** pinned **Robbie E** ... **Kacee Carlisle** pinned **Mickie James** ... **Sonny Deeds** pinned **Shane Douglas** ... **Kindred Ky'mari** beat **Crazii Shea** in a casket match. (05-16-15)

—Thomas J. Rude



Adam Page continues to show improvement, passing a tough test against the popular Takaaki Watanabe.

champion **Zack Monstar**, **J.B. Cool**, and **Chico Adams** in a four-way for the title. (05-15-15)

—*Al Haft*

ORLANDO—I Believe in Wrestling at the Team Vision Dojo: **Vertigo** pinned **Chico Adams** ... **Mike Reed** pinned **Josh Parker** ... **Chasyn Rance** & **Jesus Rodriguez** beat **Jake O'Neill** & **Brian Nelson** ... **Jody Kristofferson** pinned **Tyrannus** ... NWA Women's champion **Santana Garrett** pinned **Cherry Layne** ... SCW Florida heavyweight champion **Rhett Giddins** pinned **Josh Hess**. (05-09-15)

—*Al Haft*

VENICE—Florida Pro Wrestling at the Venice Community Center: **Donnie Abel** pinned **James Anthony** ... **George Rodriguez** pinned **Jerome Hendrix** ... **Torcher** pinned **Chris Clow** ... **Zack Monstar**, **Syther**, & **Jordan Owens** defeated **American Superstar**, **Charlie Albenasi**, & **Joe Cool** ... **Mark Boswell** beat **Richie Paradise** in a bulldog match ... Suncoast champion **S.B.D.** pinned **Romeo** ... **Prestin Caine** pinned Suncoast champion **S.B.D.** for the title ... **Robbie Cook** defeated heavyweight champion **Deakon Starr** for the title. (05-09-15)

—*Thomas J. Rude*

FORT MYERS—New Era Wrestling at the Riverside Community Center: **Romeo** pinned **Neurosis** ... **Shogun Ryu** pinned **Richie Paradise** ... **George Rodriguez** pinned **Charlie Albenasi** ... **Boston Bad Boy** defeated **Joey Bydafoodcourt** in a no-DQ match ... **Michael Kai Rayne** pinned **JB Cool** ... **Lena Taylor** pinned lightweight champion **Syther** for the title ... **Zack Monstar**, **Romeo**, & **Cubantude** beat **Blanco Loco**, **Prestin Caine**, & **Donnie Abel** in a lucha libre rules match ... **Deakon Starr** pinned **HoundDog**. (05-05-15)

—*Thomas J. Rude*

GEORGIA

ROYSTON—APW at Royston Gym: **Kevin Parks** pinned **Nitrus** ... **Frank Tru** beat **Red Ninja** ... **James Boulevard** pinned **Cody McCulley** ... **Bolo** beat **Axel Foley** ... **Stryknyn** pinned **Jacob Ashworth** ... **Brandon Parker** beat Southern States champion **Antrone Brewer** by DQ. (05-08-15)

—*Brian Edens*

ILLINOIS

VILLA PARK—GALLI Lucha Libre at the GALLI Arena: **Chico Suave** & **Punisher 747** defeated **Big Jay Knight** & **D'Angelo Steele** ... **Las Furias** (**Rey Furia** & **Furia Roja**) beat **Beauty** & **The Beast** (**Stevie Fierce** & **Rob Matter**) and **4-Star Heroes** (**Matt Knicks** & **Chris Castro**) in a three-way ... **Marshe Rockett** pinned **Lamar Titan** ... **Los Elegidos** (**Ricky Cruz**, **El Traidor**, & **Gringo Loco**) defeated **Willie Richardson**, **Mason Conrad**, & **Destructor Jr.** ... **Pentagono**, **Zen**, & **Golden Star** beat **Atomico**, **Destructor**



Angered before the match when KUSHIDA responded to his outstretched hand with a middle finger, former ROH champion Michael Elgin powered his way to victory.

Sr., & **Imperio Azteco** ... **La Profecia** (**Jesus Bryce** & **Acid Jaz**) defeated tag team champions **The International Assassins** (**Kunai Silencio** & **Golden Dragon**) for the tag team title ... **GPA** beat **Mike Anthony** by DQ ... **La Maldicion** (**Ovirload** & **Draconis**) defeated **Flippin' Ain't Easy** (**Gory** & **Façade**) ... **Mojo McQueen** beat **Barry Rytte** by DQ. (05-17-15)

—*Thomas J. Rude*

CHICAGO—Chicago Style Wrestling at Edison Park Inn: **JW Lovely** pinned **Sombra Del Gato** ... **Ricky the Janitor** pinned **Beau Anderson** ... **Marshe Rockett** defeated **Mitch Blake** in a no-DQ, falls-count-anywhere match ... **Hot Girls' Heroes** (**Roy Flash Daniels** & **Tony Nas**) defeated **The Asylum** (**Brawn the Lumberjack** & **The Lunatic**) ... **GPA** pinned **Sean Mulligan** ... **Chris Miller** pinned **Doug Simmons** ... **Carlos Rivera** defeated **Marco Anthony** and **Aaron Xavier** in a triple-threat ... **Acid Jaz** pinned **Jason Dukes** ... **Acid Jaz** beat **Steve Boz** and **Willie Richard** in a triple-threat for the heavyweight title. (05-16-15)

—*Thomas J. Rude*

EAST CARONDELET—Southern Illinois Championship Wrestling at the Community Center: **Jake Dirden**, **Bobby D.**, & **Daniel Gunner** defeated **Brandon Espinosa**, **Curtis Wyld**, & **Bubba Troll** ... **Ax Allwardt** beat **Jim Hofferth** ... **Chaz Wesson** pinned **Waco** ... **Gary Jackson** defeated **Barackus** ... **Lucy Mendez** pinned **Paloma Starr** ... **Keith Smith Jr.** beat **Ken Kasa** ... **Attila Khan** & **Chris Hargas** defeated **Ricky Cruz** & **Ron Powers** ... Classic champion **Flash Flanagan** pinned **Daniel Eads** ... **Ron Powers** won the Bruiser Brody Memorial Battle Royal, last eliminating **Chris Hargas**. (05-16-15)

—*Patrick Brandmeyer*

GRANITE CITY—Pro Wrestling Championship Series at the Downtown Dugout: **Mike Outlaw** pinned **Brandon Espinosa** ... **Adam Rich** defeated **Tank Engine Tommy** ... **Jake Dirden** beat

Adam Raw ... **Steve O. Reno** pinned **Jeff Gant** ... **Jojo Bravo** & **The Viking War Party** (**Alexandre Rudolph** & **Jake Parnell**) defeated **Danny Adams**, **Mikey McFinnegan**, & **Zakk** ... **The Submission Squad** (**Evan Gelistico** & **Pierre Abernathy**) beat **The Kobra Kai Dojo** (**Davey Vega** & **Mat Fitchett**) by DQ ... **Gary Jay** pinned **Outtkast** ... **ACH** defeated **Curt Stallion** ... **Steven Kennedy** beat **K.C. Karrington**. (05-09-15)

—*Patrick Brandmeyer*

WOOD RIVER—Dynamo Pro Wrestling at the Knights Of Columbus Hall: **Everett Connors** pinned **Shorty Biggs** ... **Brandon Aarons** & **Evan Morris** defeated **The Professionals** (**Shawn Santel** & **Mauler McDarby**) ... **Justin D'Air** beat **Bolt Brady** ... Heavyweight champion **Jake Dirden** defeated **C.J. Brady** in a non-title match ... **Mike Outlaw** pinned **The Snitch** ... **Ozzie Gallagher** & **El Hijo del Dios** defeated **Austin Blackburn** & **Dominic Carter** ... **Keon Option** beat **Brandon Espinosa**. (05-09-15)

—*Chris Roedel*

CICERO—ELLMEX Lucha Libre at the Olympic Theatre: **Rey Mucielago** pinned **Payaso Loco** ... **Angel De Los Ninos** & **El Tigre** defeated **Alas De Fuego** & **Chico Suave** ... **Halcon Oriental**, **Cruz De Angel**, & **Golden Star** beat **Funebre**, **Atomico**, & **Indio Chirikawua** ... **La Mascara** & **Hijo De Mascara Sagrada** beat **Hijo Del Espectro** & **Imperio Azteca**. (05-09-15)

—*Thomas J. Rude*

MERRIONETTE PARK—AAW Wrestling at 115 Bourbon Street: **Louis Lyndon** defeated **Tony Kozina**, **Gregory Iron**, **Davey Vega**, **Matt Cage**, & **Candice LaRae** in a six-way ... **Allysin Kay** pinned **Heidi Lovelace** ... Heritage champion **Christian Faith** pinned **Markus Crane** ... **Shane Hollister** pinned **Silas Young** ... Tag Team champions **Jake** & **Dave Crist** defeated **Zero Gravity** ... **Tommaso Ciampa** pinned **Davey Richards** ...

Ryan Boz pinned Justice Jones ... Johnny Gargano pinned Chris Sabin ... Josh Alexander defeated heavyweight champion Eddie Kingston and Samoa Joe for the title.
(05-01-15)

—Leonard Brand

INDIANA

SEYMOUR—EMERGE Wrestling at the Celebrations Event Center: BAD defeated The 8bit Punks to become the first EMERGE tag team champions ... Kenneth James pinned King Crush ... Vinny Blazano defeated Zodiak by DQ ... Joe Pittman pinned Lennox Norris ... Donny Idol pinned Jacob Johns ... Khris Kaliber pinned Bret Havoc ... JD Mariani pinned Apollo Starr.
(05-09-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

COLUMBUS—Hoosier Pro Wrestling at the 4-H Fairgrounds: Mitch Johnson pinned Andrew Stryker ... Lightning Bolt & Drax O'Brien beat JKO & JKO Junior and Shawn Kemp & Mystery Partner in a three-way ... Bobby Black pinned Eddie Felson ... Stompin' Steve & Lylah Lodge defeated Intergender

champions Dash & LuFisto for the title ... Marc Huston beat Butcher Manson and Dynamite Dillen in a three-way ... TVZ defeated Flash Flanagan and TJ Kemp in a three-way ... Shiloh Jones pinned Tri-State champion Shawn Cook for the title ... Rob Ramer pinned Rob Conway.
(05-02-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

TERRE HAUTE—New Wave Pro Wrestling at the Zorah Shrine Temple: Bob Rogers pinned Jackson White ... Owen Travers & Fat Tony defeated Jumal & Jay ... Justin Myers won the 2015 Shriners Cup ... Rough Cut (Bo Sawyer & Josh Steel) defeated Ten-Minute Magic (Brian Klass & Matt Jones) ... Thomas Moore defeated Spencer Wallace in a bullrope match ... Dominique Fabino pinned Cameron Starr ... Jason Levi, TJ Roberts, & Blake Reed beat Kongo Kong, Krauser, & Mark Vandy.
(05-02-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

IOWA

SEYMOUR—EMERGE Wrestling at the Celebrations Event Center: BAD defeated The 8bit Punks to become the first EMERGE tag team champions ... Kenneth James pinned King Crush ... Vinny Blazano defeated Zodiak by DQ ... Joe Pittman pinned Lennox Norris ... Donny Idol pinned Jacob Johns ... Khris Kaliber pinned Bret Havoc ... JD Mariani pinned Apollo Starr.
(05-09-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

NEVADA—3XWrestling at the Leonard Dueland Pavilion: Sentai defeated SM King & Pat Powers in three-way ... JD Riggs defeated Rich Brooks ... Don Desher beat Devin Carter ... Rory Fox defeated Adrian Alexander Jesse ... Malone beat Brady A Dezire ... Mark McDowell won a battle royal ... Jeff Thompson Memorial Tournament, Semifinals: Mark Sterling & Zach Thompson defeated The American Bulldogs (Mark McDowell & Jon West) ... Jimmy Rockwell & Jeremy Wyatt defeated AC/DC (Arik Cannon & Darin Corbin) ... Final: Jimmy Rockwell and Jeremy Wyatt defeated Mark Sterling and Zach Thompson
(05-09-15)

—Brian Kelley

KENTUCKY

LEXINGTON—WWE at the Rupp Arena: Adrian Neville pinned Bad News Barrett ... Damien Sandow beat Heath Slater ... Divas champion Nikki Bella pinned Naomi

... Fandango defeated Adam Rose ... Dean Ambrose pinned Luke Harper ... Erick Rowan defeated Bo Dallas ... Tag team champions New Day defeated The Ascension, Tyson Kidd & Cesaro, and Prime Time Players in a four-way ... U.S. champion John Cena defeated Rusev.
(05-10-15)

—Simon Patrice

SHOPVILLE—New Kentucky Zone Wrestling at the Old Shopville Gym: Frank Vanover pinned Oblivion ... Bad Company (The Super Assassin & Johnny Suede) defeated Bad Attitude (B.W. Anderson & Thurston Kade) ... Miss Ashley & Kirk Patrick beat Michelle Meyers & Chief Tomahawk ... Johnny Bad pinned Flap Jack Jones ... Frank the Tank & Slick Wayne defeated Trash Kan Graham & Jordan Hazard ... Chris Harris beat heavyweight champion Joe Edmonds by DQ.
(05-09-15)

—Frank Hobbs

LOUISVILLE—WWE at Freedom Hall: Adrian Neville pinned Bad News Barrett ... Damien Sandow beat Heath Slater ... Divas champion Nikki Bella pinned Naomi ... Fandango defeated Adam Rose ... Dean Ambrose pinned Luke Harper ... Erick Rowan defeated Bo Dallas ... Tag team champions New Day defeated The Ascension and Tyson Kidd & Cesaro in a three-way ... U.S. champion John Cena defeated Rusev.
(05-09-15)

—Simon Patrice

MARYLAND

WALDORF—Maryland Championship Wrestling at The Unique Sports Academy: G-Fed beat Hoss Haggod ... The Eckstorage beat Sudden Impact, The Punk Rock All Stars, & Dixon Line Security in a four-corners match ... Fenix Fury defeated Andrew Steel ... Drollox, Napalm, & Solo beat The Hell Cats & Rikishi ... Paul Jordane beat Mustafa Aziz Daniels ... Women's champion Amber Rodriguez beat Sera Feeny ... Rage champion Brandon Scott defeated Chuck Lennox ... The Bruiser & Jerry Lawler defeated Ryan McBride, Ken Dixon, and Justin Schlegal in a handicap match.
(05-02-15)

MASSACHUSETTS

WORCESTER—WWE at the DCU Center: Adrian Neville pinned Bad News Barrett ... Erick Rowan pinned Zack Ryder ... The Prime Time Players (Titus O'Neil & Darren Young) beat Bo Dallas & Heath Slater ... Curtis Axel beat Heath Slater ... Dean Ambrose beat Kane ... Divas champion Brie Bella pinned Tamina Snuka ... Tag team champions New Day (Big E & Xavier Woods) beat Cesaro & Tyson Kidd ... U.S. champion John Cena beat Rusev in a cage match.
(05-23-15)

—Adam Cayton



Tetsuya Naito delivers a hurricanrana against Kyle O'Reilly in a thrilling back-and-forth encounter that the Philadelphia fans really appreciated.

NEW BEDFORD—House of Bricks at Dias Baseball Field: **Scott Ashworth** pinned **Everett Briggs** ... **The Beasts (Colossus & Redemption)** defeated **Christopher James & Zach Ramos** ... **Little Daddy Bravo** pinned **Christopher Sterling** ... **Mack Attack (Trainee #1 & Trainee #9)** defeated **Kris Pyro & Chris Matrix** ... **Kyle Storm** pinned Southern New England champion **Amanda Fox** for the title ... **Gary Gold** defeated **El Fire Storm** by DQ ... **Chris Cruise** beat **Shawn Candido** and **JB Tickle** in a three-way ... **Aaron Amadeus** pinned heavyweight champion **Devin Baker** for the title. (05-16-15)

—*Thomas J. Rude*

LOWELL—Chaotic Wrestling at PAV: **Warbeard Hanson** pinned **Mike Webb** ... **Adam Booker** beat **Flip Gordon** by submission ... **Scotty Slade & Mark Shurman** beat **Matt & Bryan Logan** ... **Mistress Belmont** pinned Women's champion **Kasey Ray** for the title ... **Julian Starr** pinned **Jimmy Preston** ... New England champion **Sean Burke** pinned **Brian Fury** ... Tag team champions **Brian & Jimmy Milonas** beat **Anthony Greene & Cam Zagami** ... Heavyweight champion **Chase Del Monte** beat **Donovan Dijak** in a last-man-standing match. (05-08-15)

—*David Ratty*

MICHIGAN

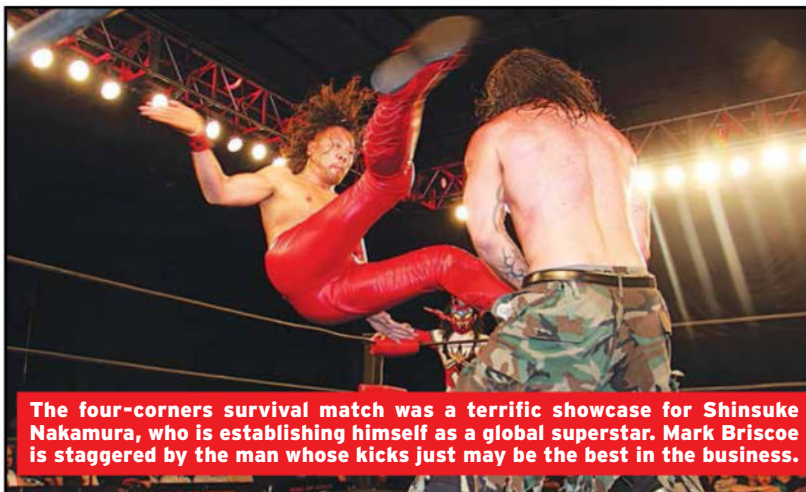
BAY CITY—Ultimate Championship Wrestling at the Prime Events Center: **Brian Fury** won a battle royal ... **Danny Shay** pinned **John E. Bravo** ... **Black Bushido** pinned **Bryan Castle** ... Women's champion **Ingrid Isley** pinned **Shayla Hyde** ... **Taeler Hendrix** pinned Women's champion **Ingrid Isley** for the title ... Tag team champions **Ben Boone & Bry Sullivan** defeated **The Kharma Police** ... **Jake Something** pinned **Hakeem Zane** ... **Justin Mane** beat **Brian Christopher** by DQ ... **Dave Duponte** beat **TK Parker** by submission ... **Caleb Stills** pinned **Gangrel**. (05-16-15)

—*Leonard Brand*

ST. CLAIR—Apex Pro Wrestling at the Knights of Columbus Hall: **Tommy Kline** pinned **Mikey Smalls** ... **Paul Bowser & Jay Abrams** defeated **Ace & Moe Evans** ... **Mr. Fitness** defeated **Grizzly House Jones** by DQ ... **Maserati Rick** pinned **Evan Craig** ... **Ace & Moe Evans** defeated **Jamey Coxxx & Kyng Jamal** ... **Father Time** pinned **Xavier Justice** ... **James Alexander** pinned **Chaz Montana** ... **Chuck Wagon & Chris Carter** defeated tag team champions **The Scarbonis** for the title ... **Grizzly House Jones** defeated heavyweight champion **Movado** and **Gideon Malice** in a three-way for the title. (05-16-15)

—*Leonard Brand*

JACKSON—All World Wrestling League at Rak's Sports Bar: **Dan Manix** pinned **Unknown Student** ... **Mike White** pinned **Harlem Jackson** ... **Mr. Fitness** defeated **Denzel Titan** and **Reggie Starr**



The four-corners survival match was a terrific showcase for Shinsuke Nakamura, who is establishing himself as a global superstar. Mark Briscoe is staggered by the man whose kicks just may be the best in the business.

in a three-way ... **Tex Monroe** pinned **Stax Calhoun** ... **Tex Monroe & The Birdman** defeated tag team champions **Frank Stein & Nick Pope** for the title ... **Rasta Khan** pinned **Tango Torrez** to win the held-up heavyweight title ... **Giant Pharaoh** won a battle royal. (05-09-15)

—*Leonard Brand*

PORT HURON—Blue Water Championship Wrestling at the American Legion Hall: **Justin Mane** pinned **Rob Clooney** ... **Great Cheyenne** pinned **Angel Dust** ... **Skinny Timmy** pinned **Maniac Matt** ... **Eric Smalls** pinned **Matt Prada** ... **Sera Feeny** pinned **Ingrid Isley** ... **N8 Mattson** pinned **Great Malaki** ... **Eric Smalls** pinned Mini Micro champion **Skinny Timmy** for the title ... **Shane Douglas** pinned heavyweight champion **Xavier Justice** for the title. (05-09-15)

—*Leonard Brand*

CLINTON TOWNSHIP—Xtreme Intense Championship Wrestling at the Imperial House: **Ben Boone** pinned **Mikey Smalls** ... **Owen Travers & Angela Layne** defeated **Hakeem Zane & Taeler Hendrix** ... **Father Time** pinned **Idris Abraham** ... **Mark Gjoka** pinned **Aaron TI** ... **Movado** pinned **Mark Gjoka** ... **Jeff Brooks & Dickie Bronson** defeated **The Scarbonis** ... **Caleb Stills** pinned **Joe Coleman** ... **Zach Gowen & Jamey Coxxx** beat tag team champions **The Painkillers** and **The Monroes** in a three-way for the tag team title ... Intense champion **Orlando Christopher** pinned **Joey Ryan** ... Midwest champion **Rhino** pinned **Samoa Joe**. (05-09-15)

—*Leonard Brand*

MISSOURI

ST. LOUIS—Mid-Missouri Wrestling Alliance at the South Broadway Athletic Club: Tag team champions **The St. Louis Connection (Andrew Wilder & Jonathan Zulu)** defeated **Kevin Lee Davidson & LaMarcus Clinton** ... **Brandon Espinosa** pinned **Austin Blackburn** ... **Gary Jackson** beat **Sean Orleans** ... TV champion **Moondog Rover** beat **A.J. Williams** by countout ... **Kevin Lee Davidson** beat Survivor champion **Brian**

James and **Tommy Dallas** in a triple-threat match for the title ... **Barackus** pinned **Jimmy D** ... Junior heavyweight champion **Everett Connors** beat **J-Mal Swagg** ... Heavyweight champion **Da'Marius Jones** defeated **Evan Gelistico** ... **A.J. Williams** pinned heavyweight Champion **Da'Marius Jones** for the title. (05-09-15)

—*Patrick Brandmeyer*

ST. LOUIS—Dynamo Pro Wrestling at Off Broadway: **Ozzie Gallagher** defeated **Lucy Mendez** by DQ ... **The Bite Club (Rocket Mapache & Jackal)** beat **The Bum Rush Brothers (Shorty Biggs & Outkast)** ... Heavyweight champion **Jake Dirden** defeated **Everett Connors** ... IWRG Rey del Ring Campeon **Ricky Cruz** beat **Brandon Espinosa** and **Brandon Aarons** in a triple-threat ... **The Black Hand Warriors (Michael Magnuson, Dave DeLorean, & Jayden Fenix)** beat **Mike Outlaw, Justin D'Air, & Keon Option**. (05-05-15)

—*Patrick Brandmeyer*

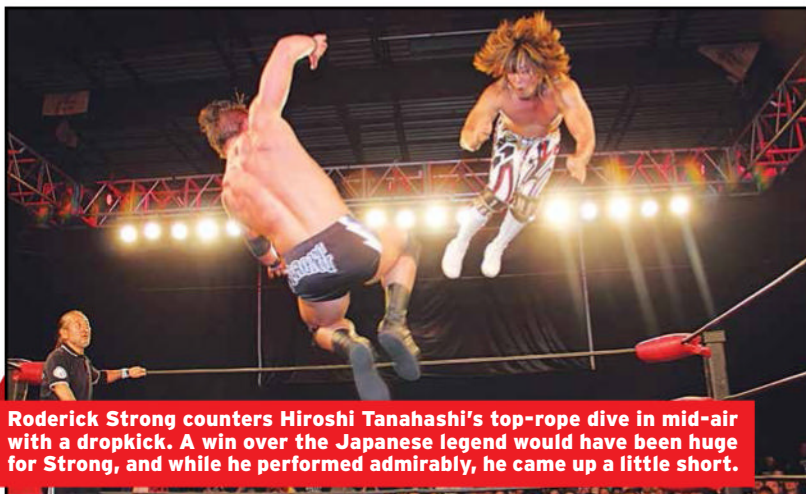
NEVADA

LAS VEGAS—Future Stars of Wrestling at the FSW Arena: **Jarek 1:20** pinned **T.J. Wolf** ... **Tito Escondido** pinned **James Dylan** ... **Kevin Kross** pinned **Mongo Vega** ... **Tyler Cintron & Troy McClain** beat **Leon Hater & J-Cash** ... **Kevin Kross** pinned **Paddy O'Malley** ... **The Pistoleros (Che Cabrera & Tito Escondido)** beat **The Following (Big Duke & Cut Throat Cody)** by DQ ... **No Limits Title Tournament, Quarterfinals: Eli Quick** pinned **Gregory Sharpe** ... **Ryan Taylor** pinned **Suede Thompson** ... **Jakob Austin Young** pinned **Che Cabrera** ... **Willie Mack** pinned **Funny Bone** ... **Semifinals: Eli Quick** pinned **Jakob Austin Young** ... **Ryan Taylor** beat **Willie Mack** by submission. (05-08-15)

—*Jay Grymyr*

NEW HAMPSHIRE

MANCHESTER—WWE at Verizon Wireless Arena: **Adrian Neville** pinned **Bad News Barrett** ... **Luke Harper** pinned **Zack Ryder** ... **The Prime Time**



Roderick Strong counters Hiroshi Tanahashi's top-ropedive in mid-air with a dropkick. A win over the Japanese legend would have been huge for Strong, and while he performed admirably, he came up a little short.

Players (Titus O'Neil & Darren Young) beat **Bo Dallas & Heath Slater** ... **Curtis Axel & Damien Sandow** beat **Bo Dallas & Heath Slater** ... **Dean Ambrose** beat **Kane** ... Divas champion **Brie Bella** pinned **Tamina Snuka** ... Tag team champions **New Day** (**Kofi Kingston & Xavier Woods**) beat **Cesaro & Tyson Kidd** ... U.S. champion **John Cena** pinned **Rusev** in a cage match. (05-22-15)

—*Brian Mays*

NEW JERSEY

ATLANTIC CITY—WWE at Boardwalk Hall: **Zack Ryder & Damien Sandow** defeated **Bo Dallas & Heath Slater** ... Tag team champions **New Day** beat **Cesaro & Tyson Kidd** ... **Fandango** pinned **Adam Rose** ... **Prime Time Players** (**Darren Young & Titus O'Neil**) beat **The Ascension** (**Konnor & Viktor**) ... **Dean Ambrose** pinned **Luke Harper** ... **Damien Sandow** pinned **Heath Slater** ... **The Bella Twins** beat **Naomi & Tamina Snuka** ... U.S. champion **John Cena** defeated **Rusev** in a cage match. (05-16-15)

—*Al Alven*

NEW EGYPT—United Wrestling Coalition at the Elks Lodge: **The Artist Formerly Known as the Orphan** vs. **Vinny DeMarco** ended in a no-contest ... **The Great Cerenzio** pinned **Eric Martin** ... **Rudo the Heel** pinned **Serious William** ... **The Artist Formerly Known as the Orphan, Warhead, & Textbook Philly Madison** defeated **Vinny DeMarco, Geoffrey Bravo, & Dave Patera** ... **The Ripper** pinned **Spectrum** ... **Slayer** defeated **Mr. Rig** by DQ ... **Jimmy Lyon** pinned **Chuck Payne**. (05-09-15)

—*Joseph Grana*

NUTLEY—IWF at the Parks & Rec Center: Junior heavyweight champion **Galindo** defeated **Michael T. Blake** ... **Manuel Arocho, Chewy Antunes, & Jessica** defeated **Johnny Angel, Wacky Wayne Woo, & Michele** ... **Kevin Knight** defeated **Mike Cammett** ... **Dan Kinnally** beat American champion **Corey Havoc** for the title ... **Tito Santana & Biggie Biggs** beat tag team champions **Lethal Injection** (**Dr. Hurtz & Shane O'Brien**)

for the title ... **Shawn Donovan** defeated **Tommy Dreamer** and heavyweight champion **Roman Zachary** for the title. (05-02-15)

—*Hal Bynum*

NEW YORK

WHITE PLAINS—WWE at the Westchester County Center: **Adrian Neville** pinned **Bad News Barrett** ... **Luke Harper** pinned **Zack Ryder** ... **The Prime Time Players** (**Titus O'Neil & Darren Young**) beat **Bo Dallas & Heath Slater** ... **Curtis Axel & Damien Sandow** beat **Bo Dallas & Heath Slater** ... **Dean Ambrose** beat **Kane** ... Divas champion **Brie Bella** pinned **Tamina Snuka** ... Tag team champions **New Day** beat **Cesaro & Tyson Kidd** ... U.S. champion **John Cena** pinned **Rusev** in a cage match. (05-24-15)

—*George Tahinos*

BINGHAMTON—WWE at the Floyd L. Maines Veterans Memorial Arena: **Sheamus** defeated **Dolph Ziggler** ... **Jimmy Uso** beat **Brad Maddox** ... **R-Truth** defeated **Sheamus** ... **Lucha Dragons** (**Sin Cara & Kalisto**) beat **Los Matadores** (**Diego & Fernando**) ... **Roman Reigns** pinned **Big Show** in a cage match ... **Emma & Charlotte** beat **Alicia Fox & Layla** ... **Ryback** pinned **Bray Wyatt** ... **Randy Orton** defeated World champion **Seth Rollins** by DQ. (05-24-15)

—*Rene Bentley*

UTICA—WWE at the Utica Memorial: **Dolph Ziggler** pinned **Sheamus** ... **Jimmy Uso** beat **Brad Maddox** ... **R-Truth** defeated **Sheamus** ... **Lucha Dragons** (**Sin Cara & Kalisto**) beat **Los Matadores** (**Diego & Fernando**) ... **Roman Reigns** pinned **Big Show** in a cage match ... **Emma & Charlotte** beat **Alicia Fox & Layla** ... **Ryback** pinned **Bray Wyatt** ... **Randy Orton** defeated World champion **Seth Rollins** by DQ. (05-23-15)

—*Rene Bentley*

ALBANY—NXT at the Washington Avenue Armory: Tag team champions **Blake & Murphy** beat **Enzo Amore & Colin Cassidy** ... **Solomon Crowe**

beat **Bull Dempsey** by submission ... **Tye Dillinger** pinned **Jason Jordan** ... Women's champion **Sasha Banks** beat **Charlotte** by submission ... **Baron Corbin** pinned **Tommy Dreamer** ... **Bayley & Alexa Bliss** defeated **Becky Lynch & Dana Brooke** ... Heavyweight champion **Kevin Owens** beat **Finn Balor** and **Tyler Breeze** in a three-way. (05-16-15)

—*Shane Leonardo*

ROCHESTER—Upstate Professional Wrestling at the Eagles Club: **Cheech** pinned **Chris Cayden** ... **Milliman** beat **Colin Delaney, Gabreal Saint, and Nick Ando** in a four-corners match for the vacant No Limits Title ... **Kevin Bennett** pinned **Cloudy** ... Tag team champions **The Rochester Wrecking Crew** defeated **The FBI** (**Little Guido & Tony Mamaluke**) ... **Mattick** won the Rochester Rumble ... **Tigerslayer 08** beat **The Interstate Madmen, Ron Falco & Bobby DiPinto, and Chip Stetson & Jordan Falco** in a four-corners elimination match ... **Maximo Suave** pinned heavyweight champion **Coconut Jones** in a streetfight for the title. (05-09-15)

—*Todd Brantle*

NORTH CAROLINA

MOUNT AIRY—AIWF Mid-Atlantic at the National Guard Armory: **Phil Stamper** pinned **Jayke Jacobs** ... **Virginia Militia** defeated **Stryke Force** ... **TR Superstar** pinned **Steve Niles** ... **Kevin Phoenix** pinned **Rusty Shank** ... **Axton Ray** pinned **Jake Young** ... **Sabu** defeated **Scrapyard Dog** in a hardcore match ... **Lodi** pinned **Ty Tyson**. (05-16-15)

—*Thomas J. Rude*

RALEIGH—GOUGE Wrestling at the Nickelpoint Brewery: **Ivan Putin & Vladmir Ryker** defeated **Rob Van Pillman & Old School** ... **Jimmy Jack Funk Jr.** pinned **Victor Andrews** ... **Otto Schwanz & Zero Gravity** defeated **No Direction** ... **Mickey Gambino** pinned **Juan Jeremi** ... **Jakob Hammermier** pinned **Seymour Snott**. (05-16-15)

—*Thomas J. Rude*

DURHAM—GOUGE Wrestling at the Motorco Music Hall: **Mickey Gambino** pinned North Carolina champion **Timmy Lou Retton** for the title ... **Juan Jeremi** pinned **Hienyker Himmier** ... **Sean Alexander** pinned **Ivan Putin** ... **James Anthony & Victor Andrews** defeated **No Direction** ... **Otto Schwanz** pinned **Little E. Langston** ... **Seymour Snott** defeated **Jimmy Jack Funk Jr.**. (05-03-15)

—*Thomas J. Rude*

LAURINBURG—Atlantic Coast Professional Wrestling at the Sycamore Lane Middle School: **Gluteus Maximus** pinned **AJ Daniels** ... **Southern Punishment** defeated **Cruze Bittle & Chris Engleheart** ... **Devyn Nicole** pinned **D'Arcy Dixon** ... **Eric Gibson** vs. **Raphael King** ended in a time-limit draw ... **Roni Nicole** vs. **Jessie Belle** ended in a double-DQ ... **Dylan Kage** pinned **Kid**

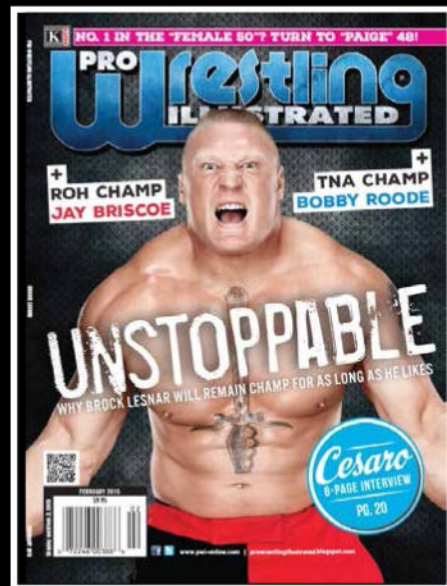
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Kash ... Shane Andrews defeated **Big Country** by DQ.
(05-02-15)

—*Thomas J. Rude*

OHIO

MIDDLETOWN—Tuff Pro Wrestling at the Tuff Arena: **Jordan Sole** pinned **Mr. 1980 ... Jesse Sinclair** pinned **Sabotage ... Jordan Sole** pinned **Havok ... Renagator** pinned **Nova Kaine ... Cedric Black Hawk** pinned **Rob Fatone ... Bad Company (The Super Assassin & Johnny Suede)** vs. **Most Wanted (Nova Kaine & Vladimir Alexander)** vs. **F.W.O. (Jesse Sinclair & Timmy)** ended in a no-contest ... Heavyweight champion **Robbie Raynes** pinned **Dylan Murphy**.
(05-16-15)

—*Frank Hobbs*

ELYRIA—Mega Championship Wrestling at St. John's Gym: **Eddie Excess** won a 20-man battle royal ... Alpha One Zero Gravity champion **Rickey Shane Page** beat **Rex Brody** and **Gregory Iron** in a three-way ... **Dirty Tom** defeated **Marion Fontaine ... Infinity champion Graham Wellington** beat **Chase Owens ... Mary Elizabeth Monroe** beat **Fighting Spirit** champion **Angel Dust** for the title ... **Brandon X & Jess** beat **War Machine Williams & Aaron Bauer ... The Bouncer** defeated **Shawn Blaze, Jeff Jevic, and Marcus Knight** in a four-way ... **N8 Mattson** defeated heavyweight champion **Soda Pop Johnson** for the title.
(05-16-15)

—*Johnny James*

MASSILLON—Ohio Championship Wrestling at Rivertree Church: **Juice Jennings** defeated **Sless Taylor ... Robby Starr & Jimmy Shane** beat **Redneck Wrecking Crew** by DQ ... **Marion Fontaine** defeated **Nicholas Valentino ... Team Darkstar (Matt Taylor, Takahashi, Levi Connors, & Flex Jordan)** beat **The Braingerous Alliance (Bruce Grey, Ernie Ballz, Johnny Attitude, & Broderick Shaw) ... N8Mattson** defeated **Joey Vengeance ... Benjamin Boone** was

victorious in the Battle Jam ... **Jimmy Shane** beat **Juice Jennings, Robby Starr, Marion Fontaine, N8 Mattson, and Benjamin Boone** in a six-way elimination match to win the 2015 DBi championship.
(05-15-15)

—*Frank Poolman*

DAYTON—Rockstar Pro Wrestling at the Rockstar Pro Arena: **David Starr** pinned **Kyle Maverick ... Nate Wings & Jeremiah** defeated **Jerrod Harris & Draven ... Kyle Kraven** pinned **Big Jim Hutchinson ... Matt Tremont & Ganger** beat **The High Life (Jerry Andrews & Great American Beast)** in a no-DQ match ... **Dustin Rayz** pinned **Shane Douglas ... Dustin Rayz** won the annual 30-man Gem City Rumble battle royal ... **Matt Taylor** beat heavyweight champion **Ron Mathis** by DQ.
(05-01-15)

—*G. Bradley*

OKLAHOMA

BROKEN ARROW—Wrestling For a Cause's "The Fight For McKinley" at the Boys & Girls Club: **Bobby Starr** defeated **Damien Morte ... Skyler Fayden** defeated **Mr. Shaw ... Drake Gallows** beat **Goon Riker ... Sam Stackhouse** defeated **Maddox Jones ... Anarchy** beat **Goon Cole ... The Soul Ryders (Mr. Nasty & Tim Rockwell)** defeated **The Gentlemen Thugs (Jake O'Brien & Cast-Iron Cothorn)** ... Tag team champions **A.C. Slaughter (Aaron Anders & Clint Cassidy)** defeated **The K.C. Wolves (Graham Bell & Luke Langley) ... Michael Barry** beat **Gregory James ... Hometown Heroes** champion **Jon Cross** vs. **Insane Hardcore Wrestling Entertainment** champion **Thomas Shire** ended in a double-pin ... **Michael Barry & Thomas Shire** defeated **Gregory James & Jon Cross**.
(05-02-15)

—*Mike Iles*

OREGON

PORTLAND—WWE at the Moda Center: **Erick Rowan** pinned **Fandango ... Lucha Dragons (Sin Cara & Kalisto)** beat **Tyler Breeze & Bo Dallas ... R-Truth** beat

Luke Harper ... Emma & Natalya defeated **Summer Rae & Sasha Banks ... Roman Reigns** pinned **Big Show ... New Day (Big E & Xavier Woods)** beat **The Ascension (Konnor & Viktor) ... Intercontinental champion Bad News Barrett** beat **Dean Ambrose** and **Dolph Ziggler** in a triple-threat ... **Daniel Bryan** pinned **Kane** in a streetfight.
(03-15-15)

—*Lynn Sellig*

PENNSYLVANIA

STATE COLLEGE—WWE at Bryce Jordan Center: Tag team champions **New Day** beat **Cesaro & Tyson Kidd ... Fandango** pinned **Adam Rose ... Prime Time Players (Darren Young & Titus O'Neil) & Zack Ryder** beat **The Ascension (Konnor & Viktor) & Bo Dallas ... Dean Ambrose** pinned **Luke Harper ... Damien Sandow** pinned **Heath Slater ... The Bella Twins** beat **Naomi & Tamina Snuka ... U.S. champion John Cena** defeated **Rusev** in a cage match.
(05-15-15)

—*Jim McAndrew*

UPPER DARBY—WWE NXT at the Tower Theater: **Enzo Amore & Colin Cassady** beat **Tyler Breeze & Bull Dempsey ... Dana Brooke** pinned **Alex Bliss ... Baron Corbin** pinned **Tommy Dreamer ... Women's champion Sasha Banks** beat **Charlotte, Bayley, and Becky Lynch** in a four-way ... Tag team champions **Murphy & Blake** beat **Jason Jordan & Solomon Crowe ... Finn Balor** beat heavyweight champion **Kevin Owens** by DQ.
(05-15-15)

—*Stu Saks*

UPPER DARBY—WWE NXT at the Tower Theater: Tag team champions **Murphy & Blake** beat **Colin Cassady & Enzo Amore ... Bull Dempsey** pinned **Jason Jordan ... Alexa Bliss & Bayley** beat **Becky Lynch & Dana Brooke ... Heavyweight champion Kevin Owens** defeated **Finn Balor** and **Tyler Breeze** in a three-way ... **Solomon Crowe** defeated **Tye Dillinger** by submission ... **Baron Corbin** pinned **Rhyno ... Women's champion Sasha Banks** beat **Charlotte** by submission.
(05-14-15)

—*Kevin McElvaney*

PHILADELPHIA—ROH War of the Worlds, Night 1, at 2300 Arena: **Gedo** pinned **Delirious ... Roderick Strong** pinned **KUSHIDA ... TV champion Jay Lethal** pinned **Takaaki Watanabe ... IWGP junior heavyweight tag team champions The Young Bucks (Matt & Nick Jackson)** beat **The Addiction (Christopher Daniels & Kazarian) & The Kingdom (Matt Taven & Michael Bennett)** in a three-way ... **Tetsuya Naito** pinned **Michael Elgin ... reDDragon (Bobby Fish & Kyle O'Reilly)** defeated **Jushin Liger & Hiroshi Tanahashi ... IWGP heavyweight champion AJ Styles** pinned **Adam Cole ... Shinsuke Nakamura & Kazuchika Okada** defeated **Mark & Jay Briscoe**.
(05-12-15)

—*Leonard Brand*



Christopher Daniels holds **Kazuchika Okada** in place as **Kazarian** springs into action. The U.S. fans clearly favored **Okada** and **Gedo** over **The Addiction**, who are edging closer to being in a position to reclaim the ROH tag team title.

MOOSIC—Grand Slam Wrestling at the Moosic Youth Center: **Jimmy Pipes** pinned **El Chupacabra** ... **Andy Header** beat Adrenaline champion **Mike Vaughn** for the title ... **Corey Orion** pinned **Shogun Machette** ... **Sean Silence** pinned **Andy Lee Ray** ... **Kevin Graham** beat **Jason Axe** and **EA James** in a three-way ... **Joey Image** pinned **Axel Lennox** ... **Justyn Glory** pinned **Wild Phoenix** ... Heavyweight champion **Stevie Shields** vs. **Clay Drasher** ended in a no-contest ... **Bo Nekoda** & **Shane Storm** emerged with the tag team title after a gauntlet match. (05-09-15)

—Nate Stein

ALLENTOWN—WXW C-4 at Mountainville Hall: **McCall** pinned **Sgt. RJR** ... **Disco Libre** pinned **Danger Jameson** ... **Gee Vader** pinned **Josh Adams** ... **Nui Tofiga** beat **Conor** ... **Sean Carr** pinned **Andy Header** ... Ultimate heavyweight champion **Bo Nekoda** pinned **Bodie Williams** ... **Afa Jr.** pinned **Alverado** ... **Nick Nero** pinned **Kekoa the Flyin' Hawaiian** ... **Disco Libre** pinned **Carter** ... **Stevie Shields** & **Niya** beat **Michael Valentino** & **Deonna**. (05-02-15)

—Eric Shaffer

TENNESSEE

KINGSFORT—Smokey Mountain Wrestling at the Civic Auditorium: **Saradox** pinned **Roni Nicole** ... **Ali Shabazz** won a battle royal ... **Gavin Daring**, **Jordan Kage**, & **Shawn Schultz** beat **Skylar Kruze**, **Wayne Adkins**, & **Axton Ray** by DQ ... **Nick Hammonds** beat **Jeff Connelly**, **EZ Money**, and **Timmy Lou Retton** in a four-way for the vacant Mountain Empire title ... **Rob Conway** vs. **Jax Dane** ended in a no-contest ... **Vince Brett** pinned **Chris Richards** ... **Jeff Tankersly** pinned **Eddie Golden** ... **IWGP** heavyweight champion **AJ Styles** pinned **Chase Owens** ... Southeastern champion **Jason Kincaid** pinned **John Morrison**. (05-09-15)

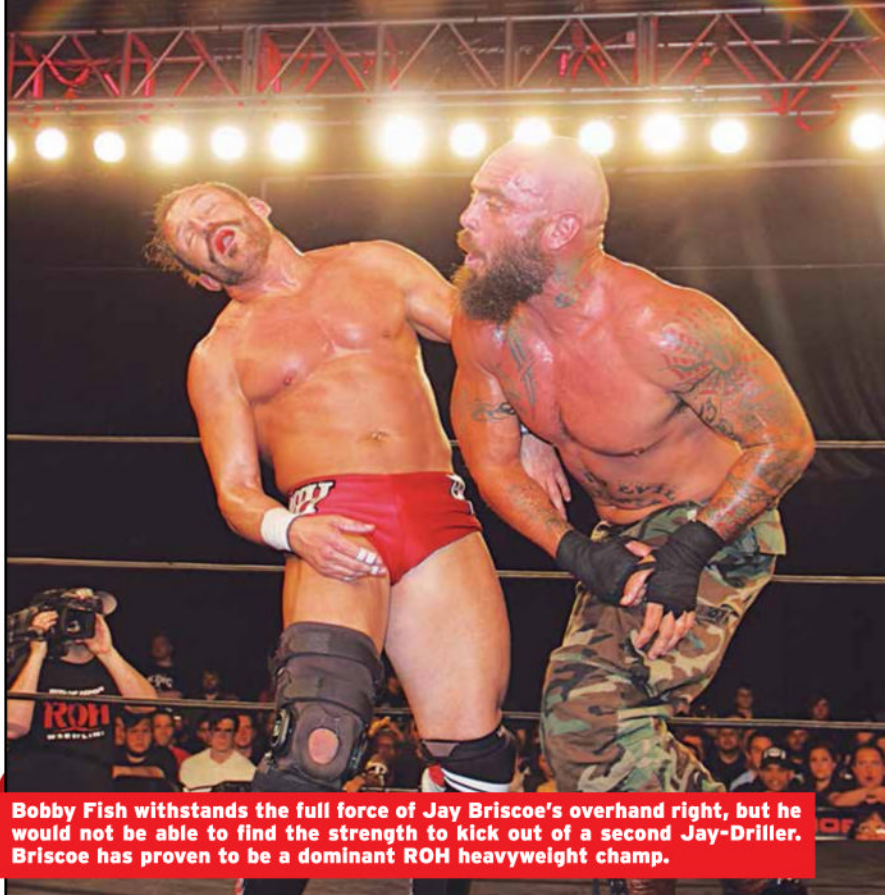
—Leonard Brand

HUMBOLDT—New Breed Pro Wrestling at the New Breed Arena: **Alex Cross** beat **Venom** by submission ... **Sean Spade** defeated **Tilt-a-Whirl** ... **Brian Michaels** defeated **They Call Me Bruce** ... **Quiksilver** beat **Tony White** ... **Tommy Angel** beat **Tommy Redneck** ... **Matt Storm** beat **Brandon White** for the 24-7 title ... **Brian Michaels** beat **Matt Storm** for 24-7 title ... **Alex Cross** beat **Brian Michaels** for 24-7 title ... **Venom** beat **Alex Cross** for 24-7 title ... **Tony White** beat **Venom** for 24-7 title ... **Tommy Redneck** beat **Tony White** for 24-7 title ... **Brandon White** beat **Tommy Redneck** for 24-7 title. (05-01-15)

—James Morgan

VIRGINIA

MONTVALE—Pure Pro Wrestling at the Montvale Recreation Center: **Jimi Love** pinned **Court Montgomery** ... **Rolling Thunder** & **Tink Jackson** defeated



Bobby Fish withstands the full force of **Jay Briscoe's** overhand right, but he would not be able to find the strength to kick out of a second **Jay-Driller**. Briscoe has proven to be a dominant ROH heavyweight champ.

Thunderfoot & **Joe Powers** ... **Ric Kelly** pinned **Zane Wolf** ... **Ivan Ali** pinned **The Hood** ... **Kyle Styles** pinned **Joe Briggs** ... **Sons of Salem** defeated **Mike Williams** & **Drake Tungsten**. (05-02-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

WEST VIRGINIA

MARTINSBURG—Pro Wrestling Showcase at the Army National Guard Armory: **J Balla** pinned **Brandon Epic** ... **Cyrus Parker** pinned **Jessie Dramein** ... **Inferno** pinned **Kevin Rowzee** ... **Travis Doufor** pinned **Officer Heitfield** ... **Sean Castle** pinned **Butch Hess** ... **Nick Tide** & **Hoss Leonard** defeated **Mad Explosions**. (05-16-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

WHEELING—WWE at WesBanco Arena: **Dolph Ziggler** pinned **Sheamus** ... **Zack Ryder** pinned **Curtis Axel** ... **Jimmy Uso** & **Lucha Dragons** (**Sin Cara** & **Kalisto**) beat **Los Matadores** (**Diego** & **Fernando**) & **Tyler Breeze** ... **Charlotte**, **Emma**, & **Natalya** beat **Summer Rae**, **Cameron**, & **Alicia Fox** ... **Roman Reigns** pinned **Kane** in a streetfight ... **R-Truth** pinned **Stardust** ... **Ryback** pinned **Bray Wyatt** ... **Randy Orton** beat World champion **Seth Rollins** by DQ. (05-10-15)

—Steve Selma

PETERSBURG—Elite Pro Wrestling Alliance at the Petersburg High School Gymnasium: Tag team champions **Bodie Williams** & **Sean Hudson** beat **Travis Tarvin** & **Tony Costello** and

The Appalachian Americans in a triple-threat ... **Eddie Page** defeated **Shane Malice** ... **Anthony Odyssey** & **Albert Huntsbury** beat **T-Jay Sykes** & **Jakob Young** ... Cruiserweight champion **Jason Radatz** pinned **Brandon Scott** ... **Shorty Smalls** beat **Tate Griffen** by DQ ... Women's champion **Kacee Carlisle** vs. **Tess Valentine** ended in a time-limit draw ... Heavyweight champion **Robbie Paige** pinned **Vince Vega** in a falls-count-anywhere match. (05-08-15)

—Tim Walker

FAIRMONT—Big Time Wrestling at the Marion County Armory: **Kindred Kymari** pinned **Jimmy Dream** ... **The Bravado Brothers** & **The Patriot** beat **Danny Miles**, **Bam Shaw**, & **Aiden Veil** ... **Mr. T.A.** defeated **Todo Loco** in a streetfight ... **Mickie James** pinned **Shelly Martinez** ... Heavyweight champion **Flex Armstrong** defeated **Shane Douglas** ... **Scotty 2 Hotty** pinned **Jake Manning**. (05-03-15)

—Shawn O'Domski

CHARLESTON—IWA East Coast at The Haunted Barn: **Ron Mathis** beat **Matt Tremont** and **Mad Man Pondo** in a three-way cage match ... **Josh Crane** beat **Elk View Adam** in a thumbtack pits match ... **Nick Gage** pinned **Sid Fabulous** in a human pincushion match ... **Viper** pinned **Smokey C** in a fans-bring-the-weapons match ... **Ron Mathis** pinned **Josh Crane** in a high-impact tables match ... **Mary Dobson** pinned **El Drunko** ... **Ron Mathis** beat **Nick Gage** to win the Masters of Pain tournament. (05-02-15)

—Nate Stein



Maria Kanellis takes one for the team, as all three members of The Bullet Club, Nick Jackson, Matt Jackson, and AJ Styles (partially obscured) deliver simultaneous superkicks. The Kingdom—Adam Cole, Michael Bennett, and Matt Taven—took full advantage of BC's lack of focus to score the victory.

INTERNATIONAL

CANADA

TORONTO, ON—ROH Global Wars 15, Night 2, at Ted Reeve Arena: **KUSHIDA** pinned **Will Ferrara** ... **Silas Young** pinned **Watanabe** ... **Moose** pinned **Colby Corino** ... **Mark & Jay Briscoe** defeated **J. Diesel & Donovan Dijak** ... **Kyle O'Reilly** defeated tag team champions **The Addiction** (**Christopher Daniels & Kazarian**) by DQ... **Jushin Liger** pinned **Dalton Castle** ... **Brutal Bob Evans** vs. **Cheeseburger** ended in a no-contest ... **Doc Gallows & Karl Anderson** vs. **Michael Bennett & Matt Taven** ended in a double-DQ ... **Raymond Rowe & Hanson** defeated **Adam Page & Colby Corino** ... **Cedric Alexander** pinned **Moose** ... **Hiroshi Tanahashi & Tetsuya Naito** defeated **Matt Sydal & ACH** ... **Shinsuke Nakamura** pinned **Roderick Strong** ... **Michael Elgin** pinned **Gedo** ... **The Young Bucks** (**Matt & Nick Jackson**) & **AJ Styles** defeated **Kazuchika Okada, Rocky Romero, & Trent Barreta**. (05-16-15)

—Leonard Brand

TORONTO, ON—ROH Global Wars 15, Night 1, at Ted Reeve Arena: **Moose & Gedo** defeated **Silas Young & Watanabe** ... **KUSHIDA** beat **Chris Sabin** and **Kyle O'Reilly** in a three-way ... **Michael Bennett & Matt Taven** beat **Jushin Liger & Matt Sydal** ... **Kazuchika Okada** pinned **Cedric Alexander** ... Tag team champions **The Addiction** (**Christopher Daniels & Kazarian**) beat **Rocky Romero & Trent Barreta** and **BJ Whitmer**

& **Adam Page** in a three-way ... **Shinsuke Nakamura** pinned **ACH** ... TV champion **Jay Lethal** pinned **Tetsuya Naito** ... **Hiroshi Tanahashi** pinned **Michael Elgin** ... **Jay Briscoe, Mark Briscoe, Roderick Strong, Raymond Rowe, & Hanson** defeated **AJ Styles, Karl Anderson, Doc Gallows, & The Young Bucks** (**Matt & Nick Jackson**). (05-15-15)

—Leonard Brand

SAINT JOHN, NB—WWE at Harbour Station: **Fandango & Lucha Dragons** (**Kalisto & Sin Cara**) beat **Adam Rose & Los Matadores** (**Fernando & Diego**) ... **R-Truth** beat **Stardust** ... **Natalya & Emma** defeated **Cameron & Summer Rae** ... **Dolph Ziggler** pinned **Sheamus** ... **Zack Ryder** defeated **Curtis Axel** ... **Kane** pinned **Jack Swagger** ... **Roman Reigns** beat World champion **Seth Rollins** by DQ. (05-03-15)

—John Reynolds

OSHAWA, ON—WWE at the General Motors Centre: **Adrian Neville** pinned **Bad News Barrett** ... **The Prime Time Players** (**Titus O'Neil & Darren Young**) & **Jimmy Uso** beat **The Ascension** (**Konnor & Viktor**) & **Erick Rowan** ... **Damien Sandow** pinned **Bo Dallas** ... **Sami Zayn** pinned **Erick Rowan** ... **Ryback** pinned **Rusev** ... **Charlotte** pinned **Naomi** ... **Tyson Kidd & Cesaro** beat tag team champions **Kofi Kingston & Big E** by DQ ... **Dean Ambrose** pinned **Luke Harper**. (05-03-15)

—Josh Baker

CORNWALL, ON—Mecca Pro Wrestling at the Agora Center: **Persephone Vice**

pinned **Jewells Mallone** ... **Mario** defeated **Bret McLeod** ... **The Barbarians** vs. **KL Shock & Ray Steel** ended in a double-countout ... **Joey Valentyne** pinned **Kwan Chang** ... **CJ Felony** pinned **Deeno** ... **Crimson** pinned **Pound-for-Pound** champion **Derric Hamilton** for the title ... **Decker Leduc** pinned **Jesse Amato** ... **Damien Styles** pinned **Catalyst** ... **Rhyno** pinned **heavyweight** champion **Payne** for the title. (05-02-15)

—Jason Setnyk

MISSISSAUGA, ON—Destiny World Wrestling at Don Kolov Arena/Battle Arts Academy: **Josh Alexander** pinned **Tyler Tirva** ... **Tyson Dux** pinned **Pepper Parks** ... **Randy Reign** pinned **Jon Bolen** ... **RJ City & Cody Deaner** beat **Action Jackson & Will White** ... **Kongo Kong** pinned **Jimmy Nutts** ... **Leah Von Dutch** beat **Alexia Nicole** by submission ... **Brian Cage** pinned **PJ Black** in a TLC match. (05-03-15)

—Bob Kapur

HAMILTON, ON—Great White North Wrestling at the Ukrainian Cultural Center: **Reggie Marley** pinned **Kwan Chang** ... **Junior heavyweight** champion **James Masterson** defeated **Cannonball Hall** by DQ ... **Angus Campbell & Falcor #1** beat tag team champion **Jimmy King** in a handicap match for the title ... **Ruin Mayne** beat **Donovan Jack O'Shea** for the vacant Commonwealth title ... **Tommy Burch** pinned **Alexander the Great** ... **Heavyweight** champion **Rocky Giovanni** vs. **T-Rex Atkins** ended in a double-countout. (05-03-15)

—Chris DeCarvalho

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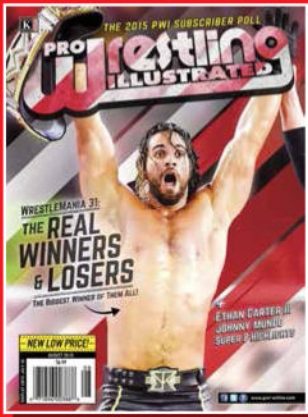
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REAL DEAL

Clearly, the big winner at WrestleMania 31 was Seth Rollins. You don't need PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED to tell you that. But the year's biggest event had winners who never had their arms raised and losers whose shoulders were never pinned to the mat.

"I look forward to your 'Real Winners & Losers' analysis in the issue following WrestleMania (August 2015)," wrote Greg Salant. "It never would have occurred to me that title-winners Daniel Bryan and John Cena were actually losers because they were now saddled with meaningless titles. Good insight."

"I'd have listed Stephanie McMahon as a real winner," wrote Jody Helms. "The way she delivered her lines and those facial expressions make me wonder why she's never been in a WWE film."

"The Undertaker was the real loser," noted Jed Bradley. "He performed well enough, but after losing his streak against Brock Lesnar at last WrestleMania, it made no sense for him to even be there. Unless he's wrestling for the World title, I'm sad to say that he's become irrelevant."

WORLD TITLE STATUS

I have been purchasing *PWI* over the years since 1988 and I've never felt the need to write to you before. However, stripping TNA of its world title status is wrong. Your once-proud magazine has finally knelt before Vince McMahon.

After this subscription runs out, I don't intend on renewing. The TNA title is recognized around the world, thus making it a world title.

I am therefore stripping *PWI* of its "worth reading" status, as you have become just another part of the WWE Universe.

ROB LORD
Torquay, England

[Stu Saks' response: I'm sorry you feel that way, Rob. The fact that we have made the decision to recognize one world title will not affect the way we cover wrestling.

*If you have enjoyed **PWI** all these years, there is no reason to think you wouldn't still enjoy it—simply because we took the word "world" away from the TNA title. We will still give as much coverage to TNA as we have in the past.*

As I stated in my column, this decision is based on the reality that WWE stands far above every other company in scope, both domestically and internationally. It's also based on our view that TNA is not at a level above New Japan and is probably no more deserving of world title status than Ring of Honor. That's not a knock on TNA, but rather facing the reality of the industry in 2015 and for the foreseeable future.

Are we still "worth reading"? That's obviously your call. But I'd hope you'd give us a chance to prove that we are not part of the WWE Universe, but that we



His January TNA title win over Bobby Lashley is one of the many highlights of Kurt Angle's career, but the belt he holds is no longer considered a world title by *PWI*. Many fans wrote to condemn our decision to recognize only WWE's claim to a world title.

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TNA will still receive as much coverage as it has in the past, assures Publisher Stu Saks. That should come as welcome news to Trevor Sherman, who wrote to laud Mike Bessler for his story on Ethan Carter III (wrestling Rockstar Spud) in our August 2015 issue.

are here to cover it and every other promotion that interests our readers.]

[From Rob Lord: Thanks very much for taking the time to reply, I didn't expect a response, so it was a pleasant surprise.

I did perhaps knee-jerk the other night, but I am so disappointed. I would be a fool to disagree that WWE isn't the biggest, but TNA has an international scope, too, and deserves world title status.

You mention New Japan and I disagree. They do not have an international reach. They are not on TV here in the U.K., probably not in America either, nor anywhere else. They do not tour internationally as a general rule. They are purely an introverted Japanese promotion. Same with ROH. It's a good promotion, but you have to scabble 'round the Internet to find footage, which doesn't make it a world title promotion by any stretch.

TNA needs your world title status; the wrestling world needs it. Nobody was complaining about them having world title status. WWE is stale, and not to

everyone's tastes. I like ice cream, but if all I had on offer was strawberry, I would go off it.

McMahon's monopolization is now complete. It's truly a sad day for wrestling, and I can't tell you how disappointed I am in you guys. This was a very poor and very unnecessary decision.

That said, you do a great job overall with your magazine, treating wrestling as a proper sport to the right degree, rather than just a TV soap opera, so I probably will keep supporting you guys, even though you have made this poor and shortsighted decision.

As I said, I don't write to magazines (this is the first time I have been moved to), so, while I'm here, thanks for all the years worth of entertainment you and the team have given me.]

BAD JOB, PWI

PWI's decision to recognize the WWE World heavyweight championship as pro wrestling's only world title is a grievous mistake. I agree that WWE's championship is the most important in wrestling, but I have a

real problem with pro wrestling's only world title being contested in a company that won't even acknowledge that it is a pro wrestling company.

Don't get me wrong: I love WWE, but there is a whole world of pro wrestling outside of it with an entirely different philosophy on wrestling, and that world deserves a world champion.

CHRIS HOSKAVICH
Williamsport, PA

GOOD JOB, PWI

I just finished reading another fantastic issue of *PWI* (August 2015), and I wanted to write to tell everyone "great job!"

Specifically, I really enjoyed what Mr. Harry Burkett had to say in his column about TNA. I was also really excited to see the feature on Ethan Carter III by Mike Bessler. Oh, and congrats to the awesome Bobby Lashley on being voted TNA MVP for 2014 in the latest *PWI* Reader's Poll.

Thanks again to all for another enjoyable issue!

TREVOR SHERMAN
Corbin, KY

PWI OFFICIAL RATINGS

FOR PERIOD ENDED
JUNE 10, 2015

TOP 10

- 1 **SETH ROLLINS**
217, Davenport, IA
(1) WWE World heavyweight champion
- 2 **JOHN CENA**
251, West Newbury, MA
(2) WWE U.S. champion
- 3 **ROMAN REIGNS**
265, Pensacola, FL
(6) No. 1 contender WWE World title
- 4 **AJ STYLES**
215, Gainesville, GA
(5) IWGP heavyweight champion
- 5 **JAY BRISCOE**
234, Sandy Fork, DE
(7) ROH heavyweight champion
- 6 **KEVIN OWENS**
266, Marieville, QC
(-) NXT heavyweight champion
- 7 **KURT ANGLE**
240, Pittsburgh, PA
(8) TNA heavyweight champion
- 8 **RANDY ORTON**
245, St. Louis, MO
(3) No. 2 contender WWE World title
- 9 **RYBACK**
291, Las Vegas, NV
(-) WWE Intercontinental champion
- 10 **ETHAN CARTER III**
225, Cleveland, OH
(-) No. 1 contender TNA heavyweight title

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SETH ROLLINS

TAG TEAMS

- 1 **BIG E & KOFI KINGSTON & XAVIER WOODS**
Combined weight: 702 pounds
(-) WWE World tag team champions
- 2 **CHRISTOPHER DANIELS & FRANKIE KAZARIAN**
Combined weight: 439 pounds
(2) Ring of Honor tag team champions
- 3 **MICHAEL BENNETT & MATT TAVEN**
Combined weight: 444 pounds
(4) IWGP tag team champions
- 4 **CESARO & TYSON KIDD**
Combined weight: 427 pounds
(1) No. 1 contenders WWE World tag team title
- 5 **NICK & MATT JACKSON**
Combined weight: 350 pounds
(6) IWGP junior heavyweight tag team champions
- 6 **DAVEY BOY SMITH JR. & LANCE ARCHER**
Combined weight: 520 pounds
(-) NWA tag team champions
- 7 **GO SHIOZAKI & KENTO MIYAHARA**
Combined weight: 465 pounds
(-) All Japan tag team champions
- 8 **SIN CARA & KALISTO**
Combined weight: 375 pounds
(8) No. 2 contenders WWE World tag team title
- 9 **WESLEY BLAKE & BUDDY MURPHY**
Combined weight: 472 pounds
(-) NXT tag team champions
- 10 **DARREN YOUNG & TITUS O'NEIL**
Combined weight: 509 pounds
(-) No. 3 contenders WWE World tag team title

WWE

WWE World Heavyweight Champion:

SETH ROLLINS

(4) 217, Davenport, IA

- 1—**JOHN CENA**
(1) 251, West Newbury, MA
- 2—**ROMAN REIGNS**
(4) 265, Pensacola, FL
- 3—**KEVIN OWENS**
(-) 245, St. Louis, MO
- 4—**RANDY ORTON**
(2) 245, St. Louis, MO
- 5—**RYBACK**
(10) 291, Las Vegas, NV
- 6—**DEAN AMBROSE**
(8) 225, Cincinnati, OH
- 7—**ADRIAN NEVILLE**
(-) 194, Newcastle Upon Tyne, Eng.
- 8—**SHEAMUS**
(-) 267, Dublin, Ireland
- 9—**DOLPH ZIGGLER**
(7) 221, Hollywood, CA
- 10—**BIG SHOW**
(6) 425, Tampa, FL

- 11—**BRAY WYATT**
(9) 285, Brooksville, FL
- 12—**KANE**
(13) 323, Jefferson City, TN
- 13—**R-TRUTH**
(16) 220, Charlotte, NC
- 14—**STARDUST**
(17) 220, Charlotte, NC
- 15—**BAD NEWS BARRETT**
(11) 246, Manchester, England
- 16—**JACK SWAGGER**
(15) 275, Perry, OK
- 17—**JIMMY USO**
(-) 251, San Francisco, CA
- 18—**MACHO MANDOW**
(20) 247, Palo Alto, CA
- 19—**LUKE HARPER**
(14) 275, Lincoln, NB
- 20—**FANDANGO**
(18) 244, Boston, MA

TNA

Champion:

KURT ANGLE

(C) 240, Pittsburgh, PA

- 1—**ETHAN CARTER III**
(4) 225, Cleveland, OH
- 2—**LASHLEY**
(1) 273, Denver, CO
- 3—**EDDIE EDWARDS**
(-) 214, Boston, MA
- 4—**AUSTIN ARIES**
(7) 202, Milwaukee, WI
- 5—**BOBBY ROODE**
(3) 225, New York, NY
- 6—**ERIC YOUNG**
(2) 225, Vancouver, BC
- 7—**DREW GALLOWAY**
(6) 247, Ayr, Scotland
- 8—**MAGNUS**
(8) 240, King's Lynn, England
- 9—**BRAM**
(9) 214, King's Lynn, England
- 10—**JAMES STORM**
(10) 240, Leiper's Fork, TN

ROH

Champion:

JAY BRISCOE

(C) 234, Sandy Fork, DE

- 1—**JAY LETHAL**
(1) 225, Elizabeth, NJ
- 2—**RODERICK STRONG**
(4) 212, New Orleans, LA
- 3—**MICHAEL ELGIN**
(5) 265, Toronto, ON
- 4—**MARK BRISCOE**
(7) 180, Sandy Fork, DE
- 5—**ADAM COLE**
(-) 205, Panama City, FL
- 6—**BOBBY FISH**
(-) 200, Albany, NY
- 7—**MATT TAVEN**
(10) 219, Boston, MA
- 8—**KYLE O'REILLY**
(-) 207, St. Louis, MO
- 9—**MATT SYDAL**
(6) 165, St. Louis, MO
- 10—**MICHAEL BENNETT**
(8) 225, Carver, MA

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or tag team. These ratings are compiled by a committee consisting of Stu Saks, Dan Murphy, Kris Zellner, Louie Dee, Harry Burkett and STRIGGA (cagematch.net, purolove.com). The numbers in parentheses indicate a wrestler's position in that category last issue. Agate-sized ratings are supplied to *PWI* by promoters and can be e-mailed to us at pwireresults@yahoo.com (please put the word "ratings" in the subject line).

AMERICAN INDEPENDENT WRESTLING FEDERATIONS: CHAMPION—Damien Wayne; 1—Justin Overstreet; 2—Josef Von Schmidt; 3—Lodi; 4—John Green; 5—Nick Stanley; 6—Zane Stevens; 7—Lance Erickson; 8—Chris Styles; 9—Keith Haight; 10—Mark Magnum

BIG WEST WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Mike Shreddz; 1—Bishop; 2—Shotgun Stevens; 3—Adam Ryder; 4—Collin Cutler; 5—Sugar Shane; 6—Black Dragon; 7—Michael More; 8—Mad Dog Sugar; 9—Slave; 10—Hellion

ELITE PRO WRESTLING ALLIANCE: CHAMPION—Robbie Paige; 1—Vince Vega; 2—The Patriot; 3—Rhino; 4—Eddie Page; 5—Brandon Scott; 6—Jason Radatz; 7—Sonjay Dutt; 8—Bodie Williams; 9—Jake Davis; 10—Chris Cline

ELLMEX LUCHA LIBRE: CHAMPION—Principe Frankie; 1—Halcon Oriental; 2—Imperio Azteca; 3—Cruz De Angel; 4—Golden Star; 5—Indio Chiricahoa; 6—Funebre; 7—Atomico; 8—Angel De Los Ninos; 9—El Tigre; 10—Alas De Fuego

EMERGE WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Donny Idol; 1—Jeremy Hadley; 2—JD Mariani; 3—Ace Perry; 4—Ricky Ruckus; 5—Joe Pittman; 6—Khris Kaliber; 7—Bret Havoc; 8—Jacob Johns; 9—Kenneth James; 10—Lennox Norris

EVOLVE/Dragon Gate USA: CHAMPION—Drew Galloway; 1—Timothy Thatcher; 2—Davey Richards; 3—Johnny Gargano; 4—Roderick Strong; 5—Caleb Konley; 6—Trent Barreta; 7—Rich Swann; 8—Biff Busick; 9—Drew Gulak; 10—Ricochet

INTERNATIONAL BIG TIME WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Xavier Justice; 1—Tracy Smothers; 2—F.I.A.; 3—Bryer Wellington; 4—Mr. Grim; 5—Necro Butcher; 6—Rude Boy; 7—Rampage; 8—Ace Evans; 9—Kongo Kong; 10—Red Havoc

NEW ERA WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Deakon Starr; 1—Romeo; 2—Dravin Frost; 3—Syther; 4—Boston Bad Boy; 5—Joey Bydafoodcourt; 6—Prestin Caine; 7—Donnie Abel; 8—Zack Monstar; 9—Michael Skye; 10—Richie Paradise

NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE: CHAMPION—Hiroyoshi Tenzan; 1—Rob Conway; 2—Satoshi Kojima; 3—Tim Storm; 4—Jason Kincaid; 5—Shinsuke Nakamura; 6—Arrick Andrews; 7—Houston Carson; 8—Luke Gallows; 9—Matt Riviera; 10—John Saxon

RENEGADE WRESTLING ALLIANCE: CHAMPION—Jimmy Cicero; 1—Nick Estaban Taylor; 2—Sonjay Dutt; 3—G-RaVeR; 4—Akuma; 5—Jun Hado; 6—Shane Andrews; 7—Tracy Smothers; 8—Mempho MOFO; 9—Jack Cicero; 10—Jason Gory

WORLD POWERHOUSE WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Xavier Frost; 1—Curtis Payne; 2—Damian Blade; 3—Alexander Steele; 4—Scar; 5—Uriah Eleazer; 6—Gauge Evans; 7—Christian Haze; 8—Bioshock; 9—The Searcher; 10—Sniper

VANGUARD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Dirty Money; 1—Jay Steel; 2—Damien Wayne; 3—James Dallas Hall; 4—Steve Corino; 5—Phil Brown; 6—CW Anderson; 7—Sean Denny; 8—Victor Griff; 9—Krotch; 10—Country Kidd

NXT

Champion:

KEVIN OWENS

(3) 266, Marienville, QC

1—FINN BALOR

(2) 190, Bray, Ireland

2—TYLER BREEZE

(3) 195, Penticton, BC

3—BARON CORBIN

(5) 275, Lenexa, KS

4—SOLOMON CROWE

(6) 200, Bellefontaine, OH

5—RHYNO

(9) 295, Detroit, MI

6—BULL DEMPSEY

(8) 300, Brooklyn, NY

7—MOJO RAWLEY

(-) 272, Alexandria, VA

8—TYE DILLINGER

(-) 235, Niagara Falls, ON

9—JASON JORDAN

(10) 235, Chicago, IL

10—SAMOA JOE

(-) 289, American Samoa

JAPAN

1—AJ STYLES

(1) 215, Gainesville, GA
IWGP heavyweight champion

2—BxB HULK

(2) 172, Sapporo, Japan

3—MINORU SUZUKI

(3) 224, Yokohama, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion

4—AKEBONO

(-) 514, Waimanalo, HI
AJPW Triple Crown champion

5—HIROOKI GOTO

(-) 227, Kagoshima, Japan

6—KUSHIDA

(-) 187, Tokyo, Japan

7—MASATO YOSHINO

(-) 165, Osaka, Japan

8—KUDO

(-) 177, Tokyo, Japan

9—MINORU TANAKA

(-) 187, Aichi, Japan

10—KOHEI SATO

(10) 220, Tokyo, Japan

MEXICO

1—MAXIMO

(1) 203, Mexico City, Mexico
CMLL heavyweight champion

2—ALBERTO EL PATRON

(2) 239, San Luis Potosi, Mexico
AAA heavyweight champion

3—BRIAN CAGE

(-) 295, E. Los Angeles, CA

4—REY BUCANERO

(-) 207, Mexico City, Mexico

5—ANGEL DE ORO

(4) 181, Gomez Palacio, Mexico

6—HIJO DEL FANTASMA

(6) 200, Mexico City, Mexico

7—LA SOMBRA

(8) 180, Gomez Palacio, Mexico

8—DRAGON ROJO

(7) 187, Gomez Palacio, Mexico

9—VOLADOR JR.

(9) 192, Monclova, Mexico

10—DRAGON LEE II

(-) 165, Jalisco, Mexico

WOMEN

1—NIKKI BELLA

(1) 131, Scottsdale, AZ
WWE Divas champion

2—TARYN TERRELL

(3) 120, Orlando, FL
TNA Knockouts champion

3—NAOMI

(-) 125, Orlando, FL

4—PAIGE

(2) 120, Norwich, England

5—SASHA BANKS

(8) 114, Boston, MA

6—SANTANA GARRETT

(5) 120, Ocala, FL

7—GAIL KIM

(7) 120, Toronto, ON

8—CHERRY BOMB

(-) 125, Toronto, ON

9—BECKY LUNCH

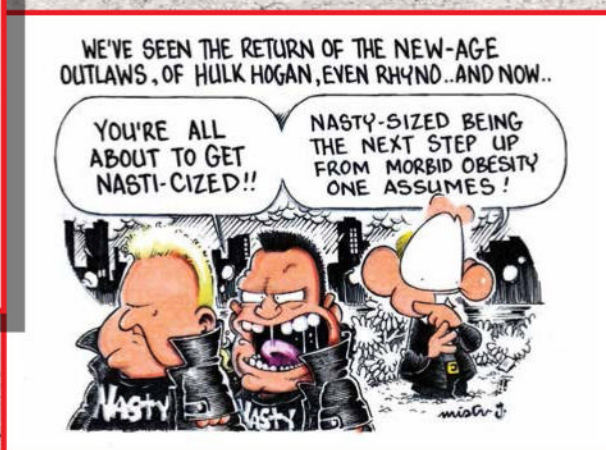
(-) 135, Dublin, Ireland

10—BAYLEY

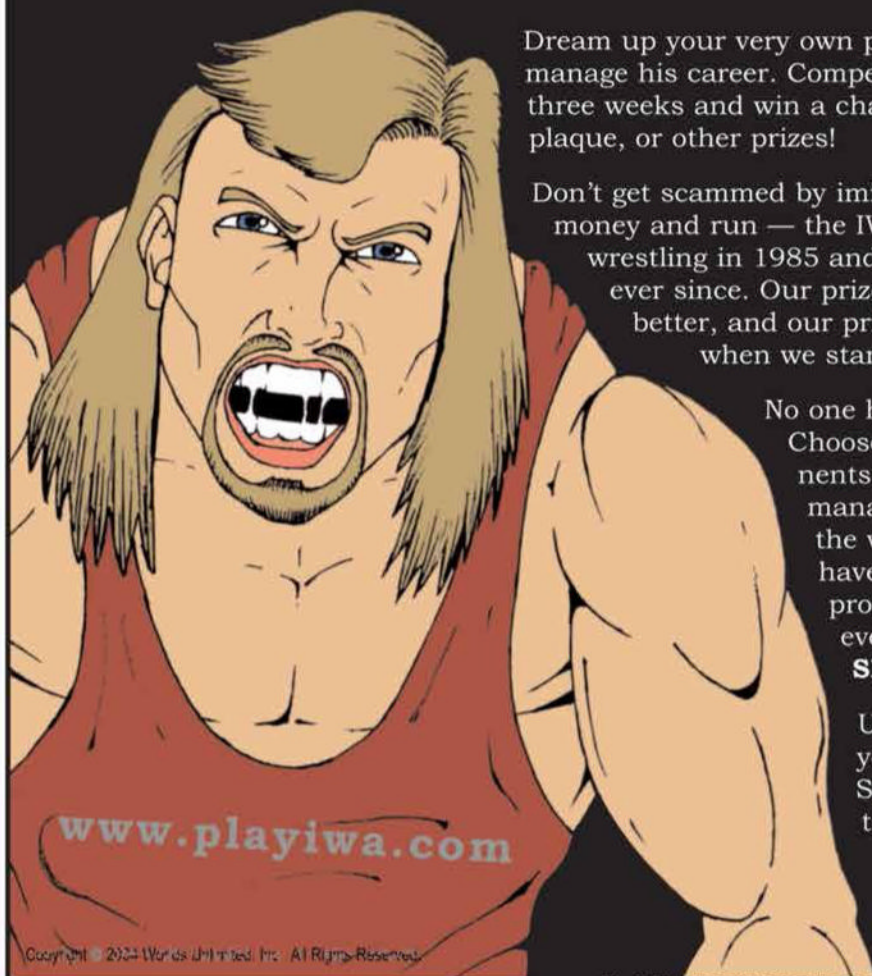
(-) 120, San Jose, CA

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WEAR-DOWN HOLDS

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Airplane spin | 21. Face rake | 41. Leg lock |
| 2. Arm drag | 22. Fireman's carry ram | 42. Leg sweep |
| 3. Arm lock | 23. Flying body press | 43. Manager interference |
| 4. Asian spike | 24. Flying clothesline | 44. Monkey flip |
| 5. Atomic drop | 25. Flying drop kick | 45. Overhead toss |
| 6. Bear hug | 26. Flying elbow drop | 46. Pole ram |
| 7. Bite | 27. Flying head butt | 47. Reverse chin lock |
| 8. Body slam | 28. Flying mare | 48. Rolling scissors |
| 9. Body tackle | 29. Forearm smash | 49. Rope burn |
| 10. Bulldog | 30. Foreign object | 50. Russian sickle |
| 11. Chicken wing | 31. Full nelson | 51. Savate kick |
| 12. Choke slam | 32. Giant swing | 52. Scissors grip |
| 13. Claw | 33. Grapevine | 53. Shoulder breaker |
| 14. Clothesline | 34. Hair pull | 54. Slingshot |
| 15. Cross body block | 35. Hammer lock | 55. Snap mare |
| 16. Double axehandle | 36. Head lock | 56. Step-over toe hold |
| 17. Drop kick | 37. Head stomp | 57. Suplex |
| 18. Eagle split | 38. Hip roll | 58. Surfboard |
| 19. Elbow smash | 39. Irish whip | 59. Tumbuckle smash |
| 20. Eye gouge | 40. Knee drop | 60. Wrist lock |

SET-UP HOLDS

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 61. Abdominal stretch | 71. Cradle | 81. Power bomb |
| 62. Avalanche | 72. Crucifix | 82. Power slam |
| 63. Backbreaker | 73. DDT | 83. Scorpion deathlock |
| 64. Backroll press | 74. Figure four | 84. Sleeper |
| 65. Belly to belly | 75. Flying leg drop | 85. Slingshot suplex |
| 66. Big splash | 76. Gourd buster | 86. Spine buster |
| 67. Boston crab | 77. Hurricanrana | 87. Stunner |
| 68. Brain buster | 78. Moonsault | 88. Sunset flip |
| 69. Camel clutch | 79. Neckbreaker | 89. Superplex |
| 70. Cobra clutch | 80. Piledriver | 90. Texas cloverleaf |

YOUR NAME (PRINT NEATLY)

STREET ADDRESS

CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE

WRESTLER'S NAME (DO NOT USE ANY REAL PRO WRESTLER NAMES)

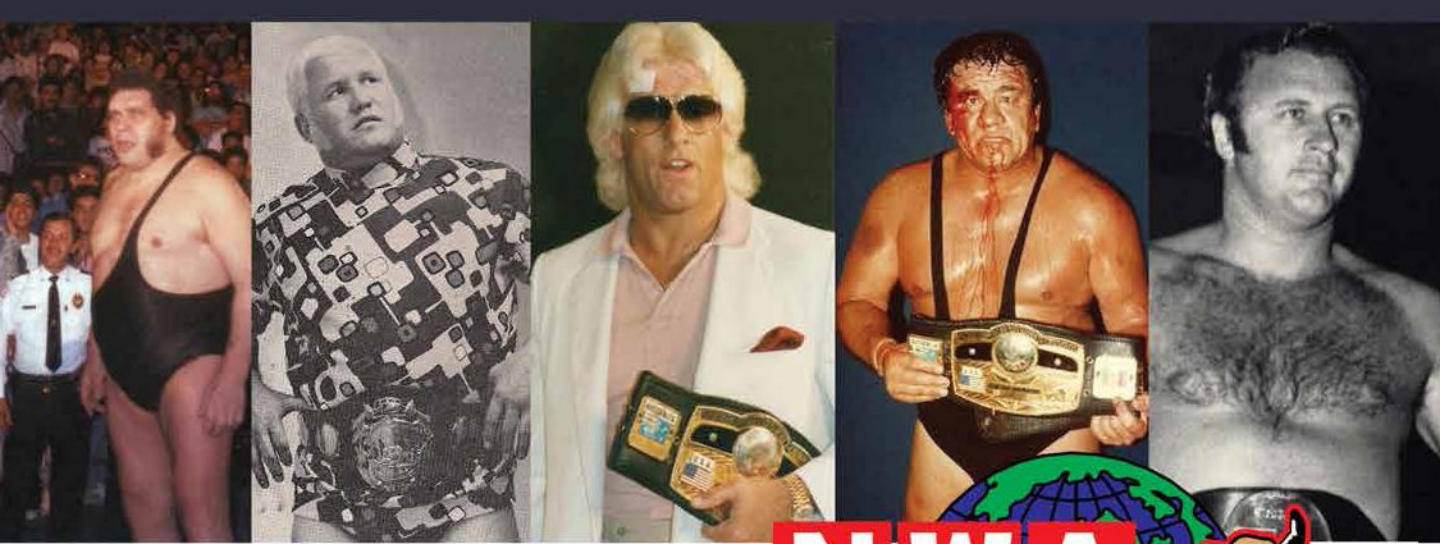
WEAR-DOWN HOLDS: Choose 10 of the holds at the left numbered 1-60. Only use a hold once.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

SET-UP HOLDS: Choose 5 of the holds at the left numbered 61-90. Only use a hold once.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

FINISHING HOLD: Create your own custom final maneuver or choose a hold from our list.



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